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Faking It

by [SoyCapitan](#)

Summary

Homicidal, hot-headed Axel meets baby faced Roxas with an affinity for sharp objects. Together, with the help of Demyx's Rasputin, they all come to terms with the fact that they're fractured individuals looking for a place to belong.

"Sharing a few laughs, we tried lighten the mood and ignore that we were all fucked up for a minute."

Chapter 1

Places like this are always a drag. Same old shit each time. I've been to so many of these, that I'm an old pro. I could definitely write one of those fucking "For Dummies" books. "Hospital Inpatient: For Dummies by Axel LaRizza."

It's been a week since I came to this one; each day is more torturous than the last. The smell, the phony nice attitude of the orderlies and psychologists, and the overall melancholy makes me what to commit a murder-suicide more than I wanted to before. The lack of decent human beings and the overwhelming amount of ghetto children with behavioral problems really get to me. I mean, I get we're at Cincinnati Children's, but damn. I thought this place was for people with actual psychological issues, not some obnoxious ADHD and petty anger.

I've only really met one reasonable dude here that isn't a total sap or a detestable problem child. His name is Demyx: A schizophrenic with persecutory delusions who had been here for 2 weeks. Now, from what I can tell, he's not faking it. I've seen some pretty sad fakers in my time, but he is definitely the real deal. You know, those little crybabies that try to kill themselves for attention, whether it is from their peers or parents. Those kids that don't want to die. They're loathsome and disgusting and deserve to be shot. They give us other real crazy fucks a bad reputation.

"Do you think we'll play Jenga today or make bracelets?" Demyx asked me lackadaisically with a hint of sarcasm.

"Dunno, man. Maybe we'll weave baskets and sing Kumbaya around the artificial fireplace in the library." I said; contempt and sarcasm oozing from my lips. Demyx laughed a hearty and deep laugh that reverberated throughout the lobby in which we were sitting.

Out of the twelve people that were currently "enlisted in the cuckoo army" as we so fondly call it, only three of us were male. Demyx, this kid named Zexion, and I. I'm almost 100 percent sure Zexion is faking it. He is twelve and a half and he got drafted for trying to hang himself. Kid didn't even do it right. Used an extension cord. Says he SHs, but the scars are so insignificant and shallow they didn't even give him a sleeve. Plus, he has this really fucking scene haircut that falls in his face. Kid, you're 12 what could be so goddamn awful that you'd want to garner this kind of attention? Oh, you failed a level on Angry Birds and lost a follower on Instagram? Boohoo.

We were all sitting around the lobby outside of the library doors, some of us in chairs and some of us on the floor. We were waiting for one of those fake ass RNs to come and tell us it's time to set our goals for the day. Mine was the same as always: "Don't stab anyone with one of those shitty little golf pencils, Axel."

Of course that was in my head. If I had said that to any of the nurses, they would put me in solitary for sure. Solitary is no fun. Especially if you're manic. They sent me to the brig once and only once. It was for throwing a chair at a faker. You know, those kindergartener sized chairs full of sand so you can't throw them? Yeah, that happened. I don't regret it, she was a little shit.

The RN herded us, like the apparent sheeple we are, into the library so we could have the first group therapy of the day. We went around in our little circle and said how we slept and our goal for the day. My goal was to tell the RNs when I was feeling bad instead of keeping it inside.

Corny, right? I was running out of options for cop-out goals. I had filled out all the worksheets in my folder five days ago, so that was out of the question. I had used the goal, "Participate in all group activities" at least four times now.

The day went on as usual: someone yelling at and attacking an orderly and some black chicks throwing food at one another and "talkin' smack." Nothing new here. It wasn't until just before "quiet reflection time" that my interest was piqued.

Someone new was here.

And it wasn't your normal stereotypical problem child resisting the orderlies and doctors or a kid begging his parents not to leave him. This kid seemed so apathetic, that by the look he was giving it could have been mistaken that he was doing a regular, mundane task. They brought him in on a stretcher, indicating that he had just been released from the hospital. When the paramedics let him

off, I could see that he was wearing a gown, but it was so large on him that it covered everything without him exerting any effort.

They sent him into briefing and all of us into our rooms for reflection bullshit. AKA TV time.

Yes, this particular hospital had TVs on the wall. There were only 3 channels, though. PBS, The Hour of Power channel, and the local cartoon channel. Of course the screen was in a glass box and you had to get up to change the channel, but hey, TV.

My roommate had left the day before. Dave. He had gotten here a day after me and left after 5 days. Accidently OD'd on some pills, so they figured he wanted to kill himself and sent him here. I liked Dave, he wasn't a faker.

I figured they were going to put the new kid in with me because Zexion and Demyx were already roomed together, much to Demyx's dislike, so I prepared myself to assert dominance and tell the kid how it is. I hoped to the Flying Spaghetti Monster that he wasn't a faker.

I occupied myself watching some show about rocks on PBS until, low and behold, an RN knocked on my door with the new kid in tow.

This kid had the most obnoxiously styled hair I have ever seen. I don't know if it was a cowlick or if he did it on purpose, but damn did it bother me. He was a blonde to boot with these big, royal blue eyes and porcelain skin. The kid looked like a little doll and, I don't know why, but it irked me to the max.

"Axel, this is Roxas. Be nice to him." The RN Joe (that resembled Rob Lowe) explained to me.

"I'm always nice, Joe. I'm the nicest guy here." I stated with a sly smile aimed at the Roxas guy. Rob Lowe Joe looked uneasy and nervously said to me:

"I mean it, Axel. This is a safe place; we don't want a hostile environment. "

"Tell that to the problem children, not me. I'm on my best behavior. Always." I articulated with a toothy grin.

All I received was a stern look, even though I could see the doubt in his eyes. He promptly left. Guess I made him uncomfortable.

Now I was left alone with the new kid. I stood up and was immediately made aware of how short he was; he only came up to the middle of my chest. I gave him a once over and he still had that stupid, bored look on his fucking baby face. He was garbed in the standard scrubs that we have to wear for the first few days. There were two sleeves on his arms instead of one, which is uncommon because the injuries are normally on the non-dominate arm.

"So, your name is Roxas, huh?"

No response. He went to sit on his bed.

"Can I call you Roxy?"

He stopped in his tracks, turned his head towards me, and gave me the most malicious glare I have ever seen. He paused briefly before saying:

"Absolutely not. Do not ever call me that again." He snarled at me. His baby face turned up into a look of disgust just didn't sit right with me.

"Aww, did someone forget their nap today? You're a little cranky." I said as sardonically as I could. I was just trying to make him mad at this point. It's amusing when people get mad at me; I guess that's from too much exposure to the internet.

His face relaxed, the exact opposite of what I expected, and he said, in an even tone: "Listen, I don't like you; you don't like me, just... Leave me alone, okay? I'm not here to make friends or fight with you. I just want to get the fuck out of here."

I kind of stood there for a few seconds, unsure of what to say. I scratched at the nicotine patch on my upper arm and sat my ass down.

I awoke to Rob Lowe Joe knocking and promptly opening our door. Well, at least he knocked. I sat up groggily and looked over at Roxas. He was sitting on the window seat looking out the little sliver of window we had. Really, could you get any more dramatic?

"Okay, time for recreational therapy, boys. Get up. Did you have a nice quiet reflection?"

"Oh, fantastic, got a nice wank in there."

RLJ looked at me appallingly. He was completely shocked and beyond words. I let out an obnoxious laugh and explained:

"I'm kidding. Please, never take me seriously. Or do, it's pretty amusing for me."

He stayed silent and left the room. I snickered to myself. Blondie walked by, gave me disapproving look along with a head nod and exited. Who the fuck does he think he is? The kid obviously has no sense of humor. He's trying too hard to be deep and mysterious like every other faker out there. I might have to tell him so.

The lobby was full of angsty teenagers trudging in from their quarters. The room was lifeless, devoid of emotion. Well, what do you really expect? The walls of the adolescent psychiatric wing were cold and unforgiving. Some shitty R&B garbage was softly playing in the background.

I sidled over to my mullet donned friend, Demyx. His eyes had a glazed over look to them. For a self-proclaimed sociopath, I felt a touch of empathy for him. I said cautiously:

"Hey, Demyx. Uh, are you alright there? You seem a little out of it."

He hesitated before responding:

"Oh, uh, yeah. They just put me on some new shit that makes me a fucking zombie. Rasputin or something."

"Ha, I think Rasputin was a Russian guy. Is it Risperdal? I took that once, best sleep I ever had. It says if you take it too long that you grow manboobs on that commercial, though."

A look of horror spread like wildfire across Demyx's face. He grabbed his chest and exclaimed:

"Are you fucking kidding me?! They did NOT tell me that when they put me on it. They just said it would stop the hallucinations. Which it did, but I'd rather be fucking crazy than have to wear a bra."

He lightly shuddered at the word bra like it was the most disgusting thing he had ever heard. I chuckled a bit at his antics. From the corner of my eye I spotted Roxas looking over at us.

He was staring at us. I have no idea how long he was staring, I hadn't even felt his gaze on me.

Those repulsive puppy dog eyes didn't look as bored as they normally did. They looked...

Intrigued. Not too excited, but not the regular jaded façade that he usually puts on. I was almost tempted to go talk to him, because something about him just makes me want to punch a small child, but also makes me want to be friends with him. I didn't like it. At all.

Before I had the chance to talk to the babyfaced fuck, they motioned us into the library for "recreational therapy." There was nothing recreational about it. It fucking sucked. You'd think they'd let us do something fun, like, play Guitar Hero or foosball, but nope we were given stuff like "aroma therapy" and "draw your ideal room and describe every fucking decision you made in making it."

We all sat down, those few overachievers who got into the library first got the four nice, comfortable chairs. The rest of us got plastic chairs they pulled out of the closet. I voted to sit on the floor.

"Axel, please sit in a chair. We can't see you."

"Well, that's a crock of shit. I'm a tall, redheaded guy. You can't miss me."

She gave me a displeased, sickened look at "shit" like she had never heard that word before. Well, I figured they weren't letting me out any time real soon anyways. A couple of other people in the room (mostly Demyx) giggled. She shot them a disappointed glance and continued on.

"Today, we're going to make a personal pamphlet." I let out an audible groan just to be a dramatic little shit. She shot me a fleeting look of being fed up and carried on.

"I want you to put your name on the front. Your goals and achievements on the inside. And on the last flap we're going to pass around our pamphlets and everyone is going to write what they like the most about you."

Well, this is new. We hadn't done this at any of the other inpatient programs I had been to. I was actually kind of excited to see what lies other people had to say about me. Most of the time I don't get very good feedback, but in the hospital you're forced to be nice to people.

So, we received some markers and colored pencils (not very sharp) and started our personal pamphlets. I wrote some bullshit for goals like, "Going to college" and "graduating," then for achievements I put "First place in the talent show in 4th grade" and "The Social Studies Award in 9th grade." I don't amount to much in life, it's kinda my thing.

They made me share what I wrote and asked me what I won the talent show for.

"Eh, I sang the National Anthem. No big deal. It was really bad. My mom has a copy of it."

"Aww, I'm sure you're a lovely singer."

"If you like listening to seagull sex, maybe."

She gave me that look again. And moved on. Demyx was next and his goal was to get better and to major in music.

"Aww, you and Axel could start a band, Demyx!"

"Yeah, we'll call ourselves 'The Basket Cases.'"

"I think that's already been done!" Some girl said to me like I cared.

"Yeah, we'll do it better!" Demyx exclaimed. I laughed heartily.

"Let's move on. Roxas, what did you write?"

He was silent for a few moments before he softly spoke:

"Do I have to share?"

She hesitated before she said:

"Well, no, but I would like you to. It's good to do stuff out of your comfort zone, that's how you grow. But you don't have to..." She explained with a saddened tone to her voice. Roxas sighed.

"Well, I want to be an art therapist."

"Oh, how neat! We have an art therapist who comes here and does Rec. therapy on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I can't wait for you to meet her! She's as nice as can be!"

"I can't wait." Roxas spoke with considerably less amount of enthusiasm as her. He had that annoying, disinterested look on his face again.

Next, we passed around our pamphlets and wrote what we liked the most about each person.

There were a couple of them that I wanted to write, "You are an annoying little shit," but I refrained. On Demyx's I was sincere and wrote him a big paragraph about how awesome and funny he is. He really is a cool guy, a little ditzy sometimes, but a cool guy nevertheless.

Then I got to Roxas's. He had spent a lot of time decorating the front of it. He had drawn a sword among other things on it. I don't know if that was supposed to symbolize something, or if he just liked Skyrim. Who knows? I read other people had written and most of it went like, "I don't really know you, but you have cool hair." So I wrote something I thought was appropriate:

"Roxas, you don't like me, and that's okay, but don't be so sour. Also, do you style your hair that way or is it a cowlick? - Axel"

We weren't really supposed to sign it, but I couldn't help myself. He would probably be a big baby about it and tell one of the RNs. It was a joke.

The pamphlets went all the way around and I finally got mine back. I looked through all the ridiculously stupid shit people had written. A lot of "u have cool hair" "u r funny." Demyx's was nice:

"Axel, you are my best friend in this hellhole and I hope we can be friends outside of here. And some skittles. Rock on. - Demyx"

I was surprised he remembered that joke from my third day here. It's a quote I said from some movie when we saw Skittles in the vending machine on the way to the gym.

I read through them again and again, trying to find which one was Roxas's. I flipped it over and at the very bottom scrawled in very sloppy handwriting it said,

"Axel. You are a pretentious asshole, but also kind of endearing. Stop trying so hard. - Roxas"

I sat there silently for a minute, which was kind of out-of-character for me. I read it over again and I felt this anger build up inside of me.

Oh, I was livid.

Chapter 2

Everyone was all smiles while I sat and stewed in my own rage. Who the hell does he think he is calling me a pretentious asshole? He is the pretentious asshole. He's the one walking around like he's better than God. I just like to have a good time. I'm not going to put up with this bullshit. Everyone was released from the library and we were herded to our next activity. For the remainder of the day, I just brooded about my ego being smeared across the tiled floor like a dead bug. I tried to keep to myself, tried to keep it down. I didn't have to deal with his smug little face at dinner because he didn't have privileges to go to the dining room yet. You know, with real forks and knives?

I didn't even eat all of my dinner. I mean, I've gotten criticism my whole life. I'm used to some people hating me. But they're not him. Someone like him doesn't have any right to think he's better than me. He's a pansy little faker. He's probably 13. Little kids aren't supposed to talk to adults like that.

We came back from dinner. We had to go to the gym and Demyx and I played volleyball. Well, more like hit the ball and chase.

"You okay, Paxil Axel?"

Demyx said with an added giggle. I chuckled at the reference to our earlier conversation about how I used to take Paxil and my sister called me Paxil Axel.

"Yeah, man. Just a little pissed about that pamphlet thing."

"Oh well. He's probably like Zexion. Zexion calls me an asshole all the time, but it's only because he's a kid. They don't have the maturity of men like us!"

I snorted at the insinuation that we were mature men and continued to hit the deflated volleyball. It was finally free time. Finally my time to confront that little bastard. The closer I walked to our room, the more my rage consumed me. I felt it in the pit of my stomach. I was going to chew his ass out, in the least homosexual way possible.

I arrived to our room and they had already put Roxas's name alongside mine on the door. It made me sick. I burst open the door and lo and behold, there was blondie. He was sitting on his bed with his sleeves off, hair plastered to his face. He had just gotten out of the shower I assume. I could see the wounds on his arms. There were several smaller ones that looked older and then fresh deep ones that weren't as frequent. There were hesitation marks around the large, stitched up ones going down his wrists toward his elbows. He must have been airing them out.

I hadn't realized how bad he harmed until now. I was still pissed. I wanted to tell him off. I wanted to tell him how he was irrelevant and how he was a faker, but after witnessing the severity of his wounds, I didn't know if I could do it.

He turned his head toward me, slowly. His eyes were bloodshot, I don't know if it was from the shower, or if he was crying. I didn't really care at that point. I was standing there, still staring at him.

"Can I help you... Axel?" He spoke softly.

I wanted to feel bad for him, but the way he said my name made me go fucking ballistic.

"Boy, you really went to a great length to make it look like you actually have problems, kiddo."

"... I came in on a stretcher."

"And then you said you just wanted to get the fuck out of here."

"I-" He started to say and I cut him off.

"If you were real, you'd want to recover."

"I do, it's ju--"

"Fuckin' faker."

He turned his head away from me for a moment before standing up and whipping around to face me. He stomped over to me and pointed a finger at me. He looked like an angry hedgehog and I couldn't help but audibly chuckle.

"Oh, okay. You're clearly the faker here. You're way too happy to be here. You're here to fuck

up everyone else's recovery just so you can get a laugh and get out of school."

His tongue was poison. The words cascaded down in a waterfall of contempt. I stood there like an idiot while he began to walk away, unsure of what to say. Then it hit me. Oh, you thought I was angry earlier? I was beyond enraged.

What I did next was beyond my control. While Roxas was turned away, I darted over to the desk that his toiletries were still on, picked up a mostly empty shampoo bottle, and threw it at him. It wasn't a huge shampoo bottle, one of those little shitty ones that they give you your first day, but my aim is deadly and it hit him square on the shoulder.

He faltered briefly before saying quietly:

"Is that all you've got?"

I grabbed the toothbrush and chucked it in his direction in my fit of rage. Then the toothpaste, the comb, and the deodorant followed; each thrown harder than the last. They all hit him. I heard him lightly giggle.

"You don't fucking know me, bitch boy. You think I'm faking it? I'll show you how real I am!"

"Are you going to show me your true form and go Super Saiyan?" He said with a sarcastic tone in his voice turning to face me. His big blue orbs were interested for once.

"Don't fuck with me, you little shit. I'm serious, I will kill you."

"Wow, thanks for saving me the trouble."

I snatched up his ugly yellow folder that we were all given and hurled it as hard as I could. It hit his stomach and scattered papers all over the floor. He snickered at me like he enjoyed the abuse.

"You think this is funny?"

"Actually, I do. Thanks for the great show. You'll win an Oscar someday. Bravo. "

That was it. I was tired of his little blond, sarcastic ass. I clutched the heavy, kindergartener sized chair next to the desk. I was prepared to show him my wrath in full. Consumed by my fury, I picked up the chair. I was about to throw it at him, hoping to harm him in some way, anything just to get that smug fucking look off of his face.

He didn't look scared, he didn't cower in fear of me, and he just stood and stared at me. Stared at me like we were talking about the weather or last night's episode of American Idol. It really put a damper on my power high.

I stood there, chair in my hands, ready to throw. Then I remembered the last time I threw a chair. I had received solitary for 2 days. That was the shittiest experience of my life thus far. I contemplated whether it was worth it to get solitary just to get back at this babyfaced fuck. The chair was becoming increasingly heavier every second that I thought about it.

I set the chair down. I set the fucking chair down. He looked at me intrigued, looked at me unsure of what I would do next. The sigh escaped me before I could hinder it. I couldn't look at him; I just didn't know what to do with myself.

I started to pace. I'm sure he looked at me in an odd way, but my head was turned. The pacing continued for a good fifteen seconds. Running a hand through my hair, I turned to him. His face was turned up in an expression of curiosity. We had a stare-down for several seconds before throwing my hands up in frustration.

"What the fuck ever, just don't talk to me."

I stormed out of the room, still unsure of what to do with myself. I stomped into the lobby where mostly everyone else was. The little shits were seated around the table eating snacks and talking. On my way over to join them I was stopped by an RN. She had that phony concerned look on her face, I'm almost positive she just wanted to go home.

"Are you alright, Axel?"

Rolling my eyes at her I responded sardonically:

"Yes. I'm just dandy. Don't you worry about me!"

"I'm serious, Axel. It was your goal today to tell us when you're feeling bad. You look upset. "

I could feel myself cooling off a bit, but this lady was stirring me up again.

"I always look upset, it's just my face."

The fake worry made her wrinkle her brow at me, but she just slowly walked away. Fucking finally. I made my way toward the gaggle of little shits. Demyx was sitting with them, so I put on

the biggest grin I could muster and sat my ass down next to my friend.

“Hey, buddy. Where’s your roomie?”

I hesitated a second before saying:

“Who the fuck cares? Let’s play Apples to Apples.”

He shrugged while I dreaded going back to that room.

My mood was lifted from owning some newbies at Apples to Apples. I took my cocktail of drugs from that little Dixie cup they give us and then readied myself for battle. I didn’t know if I would survive this one, I fought gallantly in the battle of the blond. We had a couple of casualties, but we survived. I’m almost sure we lost, though.

I didn’t know if I was mentally prepared to face that little shit again, but I had no choice. The door was cracked and I could hear voices inside. One was soft; the other was attempting to sound soothing and comforting, but failing. Puzzled, I opened the door without knocking.

Roxas was getting your standard body-check. They had a large sheet draped around him while they looked over his arms and legs. I don’t know what exactly they’re looking for, and I didn’t understand the protocol at all. There could easily be wounds on his stomach too, and if he knows you’re not going to check there, he’ll start doing it there. Psychologists don’t think these things through.

The RN saw me come in and finished looking my young roomie over.

“You can put your clothes back on, hon’. When you’ve done that, come to the medicine counter so we can re-wrap your injuries.”

“Mm.”

The woman exited without acknowledging me. Roxas dropped the sheet and nonchalantly put his clothes back on. He was wearing underwear, but that shitty underwear the hospital gives you before your parents can bring you clothes. It was basically paper thin and I could see everything. I soon realized I was staring at him. I quickly averted my eyes before he could feel my gaze upon him. Walking past him, I suddenly realized the bulge in my pants. I had been completely unaware up until this point; I could not let him see it. It was an obvious tent in my sweatpants and I didn’t want him to get the wrong idea. I got random wood all the time, this was just one of the really inappropriate times it has happened. My grandma’s funeral was the other time. Oops.

I made a bee-line to my clothes and toiletries and hauled ass to the bathroom. I prayed to Mayan Corn God that he didn’t see. Pfft, I wasn’t attracted to a little kid like him.

My cold shower was brief, they always are. The shower goes off every 5 minutes so you can’t drown yourself or whatever. So, despite all of my fucking hair, my bathing only took a couple minutes.

Emerging from the shower I was met with a pair of big cerulean eyes from his bed. The bathrooms don’t have a door and I guess I left the curtain open in my haste. He was seeing me in all my naked glory.

I wasn’t embarrassed because he saw me naked; plenty of people have seen me naked. I was embarrassed because it was him. He continued to stare at me. He didn’t look necessarily excited or aroused, but he didn’t look bored either. It made me uneasy.

I shot him a dangerous glance, but no cigar. He kept staring. I was going to say something, but he managed to utter before me:

“Well, looks like we’re even now.”

“What the fuck are you talking about? Stop staring at me, you fucking creep.”

He laughed a hearty laugh and for a second he looked happy. It lightly warmed my heart, but I immediately pushed that feeling aside.

“I saw you looking at me in that sad excuse for underwear. I’m not stupid.”

He then promptly left the room to go to the medicine counter to get his injuries re-wrapped and when I noticed I was still standing there naked like an idiot. I slowly dressed myself in my standard hospital garb: sweatpants and t-shirt.

I plopped down on my bed, waiting for the Roxster to return. I was unsure of what was going to happen next. I turned on the TV to try to calm myself down and The Hour of Power was on, like always. I tried to make myself feel as un-awkward as possible. I tried to relax myself so I could

sleep, but after all the commotion that happened today, I didn't know if I could.

I turned over to try and rest.

The light from the hallway blinded me as the nurse that takes blood at 5 in the morning came in. He wasn't taking my blood, I had mine taken already. Twice. I had the little certificate on the door to prove it. He was here to take blondie's blood.

I lay there, trying to go back to sleep on that damn uncomfortable bed. The person wheeled their little cart in and turned on the light to our room. I audibly hissed. I couldn't see the RN's face, but I'm sure it was hilarious.

He went over to Roxas's bed and gently shook the kid. I heard him let out a moan when the nurse softly spoke.

"Good Morning, Roxas. I have to take your blood and BP."

"Do you really have to? Why now?"

"Yes." He sighed. His voice was soft and sweet. He sounded genuine. "We have to take it before you've eaten. Now, do you want it on your left or right hand?"

"I don't care, it'll hurt either way."

I thought it was funny he was talking about it hurting, he self-harmed, you'd think he'd have a high pain tolerance. I knew when he stuck the needle in because I heard a tired whine. If I hadn't been so exhausted, it would have been amusing.

Once the nurse did his thing and turned the lights off with leaving I just kind of laid there listening to Roxas breathe until 8 o'clock. I don't know if he went back to sleep or not, I didn't bother to pay attention.

At about 8:03 some orderly moseyed on in. I immediately sat up and went to walk out of the room before the person even said anything.

"Good morning, Axel" She tried. "Did you sleep good?"

"It's well."

"That's great!"

"No, I mean you were supposed to use well instead of good. No wonder you're not a nurse."

She gave me an offended look before saying,

"Oh, well. Sorry."

I walked away before she could finish her sentence. I wasn't up for dealing with the stupidity of people today. I guess I just woke up on the wrong side of the bed. I get rather angry and it's been building up since yesterday night.

I strolled into the lobby where everyone was gathering for breakfast. I saw a little crowd of younger teenagers together. I thought of how Roxas would probably soon flock to that group. I wrinkled my nose at them. They were beneath me.

I sat with the Demynator at the table while we waited for breakfast to be served at 8:15-ish. I didn't remember what I had ordered for breakfast that day. Demyx didn't either.

That time rolled around and all the fucks gathered around the table waiting for the orderlies to serve them. A pair of sassy little girls sat across from Demyx and I. I tried to contain the sigh, but could not.

Demyx received his plate before me and immediately got down to business.

"I hope this gravy is as tasty as it looks."

One of the girls across from me looked beyond insulted as she said:

"Um, you're not supposed to talk about food at meals."

I couldn't help myself.

"Oh my God, Demyx you are so insensitive. You're not supposed to talk about food at meals; you might offend one of the ED bitches."

"Oh ho, I am so sorry, Axel. I didn't know you weren't supposed to talk about food while eating it."

Demyx is feisty sometimes and that's why I love him. The girls were just about retort when they were distracted. I heard them faintly giggle and I turned my head.

Roxas had come out. Granted, he didn't look very lively, but he was here. His hair was droopy, but still in that obscene fashion. I guess that answered my question about the cowlick. He had

bags under his eyes, looks like he didn't sleep too well.

I immediately became aware that the only seat available was next to me. I thought to myself If I have to listen to this kid eat, I might strangle him. He looked just as excited as I did about the whole ordeal. He parked himself next to me with a grunt.

We all started eating in silence. Usually one of the orderlies or RNs tries to start a conversation and fail, but not today. Across the table the girls were whispering to one another. I tried to read lips, but the only words I really picked up were "Roxas" and "gay."

That in and of itself pissed me off. I mean, what's wrong with being gay, why was it such a big deal to them whether the kid liked to puff peters or not? I was just about to say something to their little black asses when I was cut off by flying food coming my way.

I had no time to think or act before I was a gravy and egg causality. I was just a causality though; Roxas was the one who was killed by it.

He and I stood up in unison. I flung my arms out in dramatic fashion. I could feel the hatred and anger build up every fiber of my being. It would have been a little different if it was just me, but it was blondie too. I guess that makes me an inpatient vigilante. I knew what was going to happen, but I also knew I had no power to stop it.

I picked up my tray and threw it directly at her hoping to get her back. She was soon drenched in milk and cereal. She looked at me aghast and climbed over the table to engage in battle. My vision blurred and my heart raced as I grabbed her by the hair and cast her up against the wall. She clawed at my arms as I choked her.

Soon enough I felt the strong arms from the security and Rob Lowe Joe pull me away from this little girl. I was still in kill-mode, so I struggled against my holds. They fought to keep my restrained as they dragged me away from the lobby.

The last thing I saw before I was pulled away was Roxas's face. He didn't look bored.

Chapter 3

Well, there I was, thrown in the brig again. They threw me to the wolves. No warning, no slap on the hand. Do not pass go, do not collect \$200, go directly to jail.

You would think since I am such a misanthrope, I would enjoy being on my own; it was fucking awful, being alone with my own thoughts. It was so quiet. It really made me empathetic to what Demyx was feeling. I'm one of those people that are okay when they're around others, but I get really down when no one else is around.

They checked on me in periodic intervals, which is better than them being within arm's length of me at all times... I suppose. The floors and walls were padded so I couldn't hurt myself. All I had was a bed and they escorted me to a bathroom. They watched me while I ate, though. I purposely ate with my mouth open to make them feel uncomfortable. Plus, my lips were chapped beyond fuck all and I wasn't allowed ChapStick. What the fuck ever lips.

My mom came to visit right before I was released from captivity. First time she had visited since I had arrived. They let her in and told her she only had 15 minutes, but she could visit whenever after I was released back into the pool of emos.

They let her in and I was surprised to see her; surprised that she took the time out of her schedule to see little ol' me. I wasn't always the child she detested, but you know. It happens. She has children with her new husband and I'm still the big mistake she made when she was 16.

"Hey, honey."

"Hi, mom." I tried to force a smile her way, but it probably looked like one of my kindergarten pictures where they hold up a little duck and you try your damndest to smile, but you can't because you're terrified.

"Axel, what am I going to do with you? This is the fourth time you've been to one of these places. They're going to lock you up for good, honey. And your father just doesn't call me..."

I knew for a fact that my dad called her every time I was sent to the hospital. We tried to keep in touch with her after she gave custody over to my dad because she wanted her own family with her piece of shit husband, but she didn't care about me or Xion.

"Maybe you should lock me up forever if I'm such a danger to myself and others. I bet you would if you had custody of me."

She feigned shock, but soon pursed her lips and wrinkled her brow in disapproval.

"Axel, honey, you know I love you. Are you still bitter about the divorce? Is that why you're so sour toward me?"

I grunted at her. She always acts like she knows what's going on with me, when she has absolutely no fucking clue. No, mom. I'm sour because you're a fucking cunt. I didn't say anything to her. I hoped she would just leave. Her face changed to a scowl.

"I see you still have those repulsive things in your face."

I immediately scoffed at her.

"Are you here to visit or bitch me out?"

"I just wish you would get your life together. I'm tired of hearing about how bad you're doing."

I remained silent once again, hoping the time allotted would run out. Akatosh was looking down on me, because before I knew it, an orderly had opened the door to escort my mother out.

"I love you, Axel."

"Mhmm."

I wasn't tortured for much longer; about 30 minutes later I was released back into the wild. It was about 8:30 PM when I was freed from my confines. Well, less confined than I was before. I was still in the shithole known as Floor 3B Psychiatric wing.

I walked into the lobby from the SEG chamber of torture. It was free time so everyone was either around the table or visiting with their guests. I didn't see Demyx anywhere and that really distressed me.

I decided that I should probably go back to my room, shower, and change clothes. I ambled down

the male wing as I passed Demyx's door I noticed... His name wasn't there anymore. I started to panic; he couldn't have left without saying goodbye? What if I never saw him again? I didn't even know his last name.

I tried to push down the feeling of loneliness and fear. I had gotten so close to Demyx and he had fucking left me. Just like everyone else.

I fought off tears as I approached my room. I didn't even notice the voices coming from inside. Pushing open the door I was greeted by 2 faces I had never seen before. One was a woman and one was a boy that looked like Roxas. With my astute skills of deduction, I assumed the boy was Roxas's brother. They had the exact same colored eyes, but this boy's eyes were livelier and, overall, happier. I could see in his facial expression that he was carefree. Something about it pissed me off.

As soon as I walked in, they all turned their gaze toward me. Blondie's face was upturned in a look of curiosity. The woman had their eyes and looked worn down from life. I can relate, lady. "Oh, hi. This is Axel, guys."

Roxas stood up and I observed that he was now wearing regular clothes. Some band t-shirt and sweatpants. My normal garb as well. The ugly sleeves were replaced with purple bandages.

"Uh, hi. I won't interrupt this beautiful family reunion any longer."

I turned to leave without another word because we're not supposed to interact with other people's guests. Privacy issues and whatnot. Besides, I had no interest in his family. I had no interest in him, remember? At least I was pretty sure I didn't.

Strolling into the lobby, I was greeted by a cluster of staring adolescents. I shot them a dangerous glance as I plopped my ass down in one of those comfy chairs and grabbed a random book off the shelf. It was some book about horses. Since the wing was supposed to accommodate ages 10-18, they had shitty little books like these. I replaced it and grabbed some other book. This one tickled my fancy a bit; it was called Hatchet. Now, I remember reading this book in about 5th grade, but I also remembered it was a decent read. Something about a kid getting trapped on a deserted island. I briefly wondered why they had approved this, but started reading anyway.

A couple of minutes passed by and I saw brown-haired-Roxas-look-a-like and his mom come out. I stared at them as they checked out. Brownie looked at me and weakly smiled before they left.

I sat there for a few more minutes contemplating what just happened; pondering what Blondie could have told his family that made that kid smile at me. He probably told them that I was a raging asshole and to feel pity towards me. Or he could have told them I kicked that girl's ass for calling him gay. Which was completely untrue. I kicked her ass because she got food on me and she was a little shit.

I stood up and looked around, everyone was leaving to their rooms and I wasn't quite ready to face Roxas again. I idly made my way toward my room, taking as much time as possible.

I began going over things I could possibly say to keep my aloof air about me. Or I could just not say anything; give him the ol' silent treatment. I wasn't quite sure of what was to come when I opened that door and saw that little blond kid sitting on his bed, book open.

He was reading some C.S. Lewis book which made me think he must be some kind of devout Christian or something worse. Well, there's not much worse. I was going to make a snarky comment, but decided against it.

I rummaged through my clothes to find something clean, I always waited for the last moment to clean my clothes. My dad wouldn't come to bring me new clothes every day, so I had to wash them here. But you see, washing clothes takes quite a lot of effort I don't feel like exerting. Good thing I did have some clean clothes at the bottom. A marching band shirt from that one year I did it and black sweatpants. It was black on black, but did I care? Nope. Black like my fucking soul. I took a shower, because I was a little greaseball, and made sure to close the curtain this time.

Didn't want that shit to throw me an awkward curveball again.

After five pushes of the shower button, I was finally clean. I put my clothes on while I was still kind of wet because I'm impatient. I marched into the bedroom where Roxas was watching The Hour of Power channel. Which seemed to further confirm my Christianity suspicions. I made a disgusted noise as I threw my dirty clothes into my corner and plopped onto the bed.

The TV shut off almost immediately as I sat down because it was time for bed. I wasn't tired at all because all I did in the brig was sleep and pace. I heard blondie sigh and get his book back out. We awkwardly waited for the orderly to come and tell us goodnight, which isn't really good night because they check on us in fifteen minute intervals.

"Goodnight, boys." The sound of her voice brought me out of La-La land. I hadn't even noticed her presence. I grunted at her while Roxas didn't even acknowledge her. She weirdly stood there for a couple seconds more, turned off the lights and left.

I shifted onto my side and stared at the obnoxious lights from outside that shone right into our window. It always made me feel like I was being abducted by aliens or something like that. I heard a noise across the room which I assumed to be Blondie boy's book dropping to the floor. I laid in bed listening to his breathing. It somewhat soothed me. Which made me feel pretty gay. Listening to his breathing had put me into some sort of daze, which the rustling of sheets immediately pulled me out of. I figured he was going to the bathroom or something, but I tensed as soon as I heard his footsteps near my bed.

I went to mutter an "uh," but I instantly halted when this kid climbed on top of me. Without thinking I whispered,

"Well, you can at least take me to dinner first."

I don't think he was amused, but I did hear him snicker ever so slightly before exasperatingly saying the words,

"Shut the fuck up. Just for a second."

He smashed his lips against mine haphazardly and I froze. It hit me how incredibly homo and cliché this whole situation was. His lips weren't soft either, for such an angelic looking kid, he had crappy lips. But I'm sure mine were pretty crappy as well considering the overall lack of ChapStick in the brig.

That didn't seem to deter him because he kept going. He didn't seem shy in the least bit considering how old he probably was. It unnerved me a little. I felt myself begin to kiss him back, to slip across the border from a slightly gay to a very gay moment.

I was accepting this, but that soon changed as he opened his mouth and his hand landed on my crotch. I wasn't diggin' on this, and hastily managed to detach our lips and shove him off of me. From the alien lighting I could see a look of astonishment on that baby face. It made me sick. I couldn't look at him. I had to go. Somewhere. Anywhere.

I rushed out of the room, slamming the door behind me. I could see the night staff peeking their heads around to see what was going on. Their jobs were normally pretty easy. One older lady rushed over to me; she had that look of feigned worry again. I rolled my eyes, trying my best to act like my normal self. Boy was I an asshole.

"Axel, what's going on?!"

"Oh, you know. Just taking a late night stroll in the artificial moonlight."

I tensed, keeping my cool was going to be harder than anticipated. I was freaked out and pissed off. What made that little fuck think he could just come on to me like that? Was I asking for it? Was it what I was wearing? Gosh.

The lady furrowed her already wrinkly brow and invaded my shoulder's personal space with her dainty little hands. The contact made me flinch.

"You ran out of your room in a rush, is something wrong?"

I quickly racked my mind to think of something to say to her, something to make certain that I didn't have to go back in that room immediately after I shut my mouth. I also wanted to get out of here relatively soon as well.

"Uh, well, I can't sleep. Can I have some melatonin?"

She looked puzzled:

"But you left your room in a rush, are you sure there isn't something wrong?"

I paused. I couldn't just tell her that my significantly younger roommate just grabbed my dick. That's not okay, and I don't want to be a snitch or whatever. That's not who I am.

"Uh, I'm just a little manic. Everything is exciting me. Don't worry about it. Some sleep should cure it."

I spoke in choppy sentences. Like it was scripted. I'm pretty sure she thought I was full of shit. No, she knew I was full of shit. It doesn't exactly work that way. And she knew that, but she went along with it.

"Okay, come to the medicine counter. I'll get you a couple milligrams of Melatonin. We can also change out that Nicotine patch. I think you're due for a new one."

Fucking sweet. A new patch and she doesn't suspect a thing. That took up about ten to fifteen minutes of time, and I felt I was adequately prepared to face that horny little devil in my room. I took my sweet time strolling back to that room, feeling a little better about facing that twink and telling him no. I was sure he had simmered down by then. I had given him a good fifteen minutes to whack it. I mean, that's all I needed at age fourteen or so.

Getting closer to the room my stomach sank. The door was closed from where I slammed it, but behind it I knew something was up. It wasn't quiet, but it wasn't loud; I could hear sobbing. 'Oh shit' thoughts came to my mind as I twisted that doorknob. I knew he still had to be in there because the door only opens from the outside if it's all the way shut. Well, I mean, what else would be sobbing in our room?

The sight before me was a horrific one. Even for me. I could barely see him because he was in the darkness of my shadow and the room, but what I could see was blood. Lots of blood. It was like the red sea had flooded our room (Ignore the fact that the red sea isn't actually red). It glistened in what little light there was. It was like a pond of his life source or some shit. His head was hung and he was on his knees. I looked at the ground and saw purple scraps floating about in the blood. I didn't dare say anything. I didn't want these hospital fuckos to blame this on me. But I couldn't look away. He had pulled his stitches out. I was wondering how he had gone about it when I saw the glimmer of what seemed to be a paper clip. This kid was a lot more brutal than I had originally anticipated. In that moment, I had gained some more respect for him. One would think that you would lose respect for a person that had tried to kill themselves with a paper clip. But it was quite the opposite.

He continued to sob as I continued to stare. His sobs became very garbled, like he was trying to say something, but couldn't get his mouth to form the words. I could see his lips quiver slightly in the dim light that was pouring into our room. His blond hair with that stupid cowlick drooped immensely. I just didn't know what to do.

After a few more seconds of staring someone finally jogged over to me. She asked me what was wrong as I moved out of the way. She stopped and gasped in an over-dramatic movie kind of way. Her hand moved to her mouth and I rolled my eyes at her. Even in a situation like this I was still a sardonic asshole. She turned a shade of green. Not an actual shade of green, but she got really pale and screamed for help. She also threw up while she was running to the staff center. She called a Code Pink over the loudspeaker which is a medical emergency for a pediatric patient. I've kind of gotten used to their code system. Code Violet is my favorite because I'm always the cause of it.

All of the other patients peeked out their doors. Or at least I assumed they did. Zexion and some new kid poked their head out in our wing. Nosy little fuckers. A heard of RNs ran over. They needed the big dogs for this mission. None of those pussy little counselors. I was instantly pushed out of the way. The flipped the light on and from what I could see it was gruesome. Blood stained the white tile of the floor. I could see his face but I heard his sobs get exponentially louder. Before I was escorted away, I heard him scream something about letting him die or whatever. And for a brief second, it broke my heart. I have been there.

The next couple hours are kind of hazy because I was tired from the Melatonin and very distracted by the thought of Roxas drowning in his own blood. I had been escorted to the library where the orderly who had whisked me away closed the blinds. We sat there in awkward silence. I could tell he felt very uncomfortable, possibly because of the circumstance, possibly because I'm just an unsettling person to be around.

I had eventually fell asleep in one of those comfy chairs in the library. A whole gaggle of people came into the library and asked me a bunch of questions. I was groggy and pissed, so I answered all of them sarcastically. It didn't seem to sit well with them as they continued to press me for

answers.

“Look, I don’t know why he did it. Maybe he just saw the opportunity was right while I was out of the room and the orderlies weren’t checking. I’m not a mind reader, isn’t that your job anyways?”

That seemed to shut them up. The next day people were asking questions on questions. The counselors couldn’t answer any of them because of confidentiality and whatnot. I was curious as well. A part of me didn’t care, but a part of me also hoped he would be okay.

And I also kind of hoped that I would see him again.

Chapter 4

With Roxas back in the real deal, I had a room to myself again. I was free to masturbate whenever I so pleased again. Not that I was going to, I wasn't quite feeling it after twinkie came onto me. Something about seeing your roommate covered in his own blood kinda turned me off, regardless of how much of a sadist freak I may seem. Not into the whole blood thing. That's why I used to burn instead of cut myself. Less of a mess, right? I also just loved the way it felt. A cut is a sting, but that burn? Oh, it lingers. Even though it leaves a nasty scar. My arms look like Astrid after the Dark Brotherhood Sanctuary is burnt down. Okay, not quite, that's a little exaggerated, but you get the point. I'm not giving up that Blade of Woe yet.

The rest of my stay lasted three days, all of which were uneventful. Same old bullshit, same old Axel shenanigans. I actually picked up my ugly yellow folder for once and inside was Demyx's phone number. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief. He hadn't abandoned me. I don't know how and when he went about it, but that clever little shit managed it. We're not supposed to give each other our phone numbers or Facebooks or whatever. Privacy bullshit. But Demyx and I became such good friends that I was actually upset that he left. I normally don't let people get close or I shut them out if they start getting too close. I just don't want to be let down or abandoned, you know? I have a good feeling with Demyx, though.

My last day I was on my best behavior. I really needed to get the fuck out of there. Even though I do enjoy being in the hospital, it's a reprieve from all the fucktards at school, it does get old after awhile. You know, not being able to wear shoes or play video games. Also, that stupid fucking shower. I detest it with all of my being. Every. Five. Minutes.

I had to talk to my old geezer of a psychiatrist and convince him that I wasn't a threat or whatever. He seemed a bit skeptical, but he wrote me up for discharge. He did make me promise that I wouldn't off myself or others because he would feel really guilty and rather liable because he let a dangerous person back into the general population. Don't worry, Doc, I don't have access to guns right now anyways.

I gathered up all my shit in some cheap cloth bag and brown paper bags. I grabbed my books from the front desk, books I didn't even use, but my dad still brought because they made him. My English teacher was going to be pissed when he found out I didn't read any of Fahrenheit 451, which was supposed to be done a couple days prior. I may just burn it for the pure sake of irony. Suck my dick, Mr. S. Your class is entirely too hard for a college prep class. Yeah, I'm not even in AP English, but he pounds into us that we have to use flowery words and shit because in college that's what they care about. I have a feeling that when I go to college, they're going to literally not give a fuck. That is, if I make it that far.

Dad looked less than pleased to see me even though I flashed him my signature Axel grin when I saw him. He had that apathetic ass look he always has when he sees me. My sister, however, looked extremely happy to see me. Her big blue eyes lit up like a stoner on 4/20 when she saw me. She's 15 and pretty much idolizes me even after all the mental bullshit I've been through. Oh, Xion. You don't want to be like me. When I saw her though, my heart dropped. The image of Roxas on the ground covered in blood came flooding back to my mind. I couldn't. Their eyes were the same exact color. I couldn't let them see, I wanted out of here. They couldn't see the hurt, especially not Xion. I've already put her through enough. So I put on my big boy pants and continued to force a smile her way. She kept that goofy ass look on her face as I approached.

"They done let you out of the nervous hospital, mmmm."

She retorted in a faux Billy Bob Thornton voice. She couldn't quite emulate him like I could. We had watched Slingblade so many times. I just couldn't help myself and said in a jovial tone:

"They said I was well.""

We shared a laugh while our dad looked less than amused by our antics. Everything is always serious business with him. He acts like I was admitted to a mental hospital or something.

"It seems as though they couldn't correct the inappropriate behavior."

My dad was always pretentious like one of those novels we're forced to read in school. It happens when you're a politician. Being the mayor and the vice chair of the Republican party in our county. He likes to think he's hot shit with that master's in political science. I like telling people my dad is a politician. I tell them that's where I get my charm and charisma.

"Nope, just as sassy as ever."

"Marvelous."

Nothing more was said as he signed me out. They gave him my prescriptions and my note for missing a fuckton of school. I wondered if Mr. S would ask me if I hated him again. I had him last year of eleventh grade English and I always had to make up work because I was sick in the head. Then I missed a spell in the beginning of this year and he asked me if I hated him as he handed me Starship Troopers. My hate runs deep in that school, but I don't hate Mr. S. If it came down to it, I wouldn't go out of my way to kill him.

The car ride home was only a little awkward, but that was on the part of dad. Xion listened attentively as I excitedly told her about my time. Since dad didn't come to see me and Xion can't drive, I hadn't seen her in weeks. She watched me with wonder as I told her about Demyx and the brig and how the Tiramisu was actually pretty good.

I stopped when it got to Roxas. My sister had inquired about my roommates since I had briefly described Dave and his replacement. She wanted to know more.

"Basically he was just some little brat that cut himself for attention and ended up there. Nothing special."

Her face turned a little solemn. Up until that point it had been a pretty upbeat and positive conversation, but at that moment, she was reminded that I had been in a mental hospital, not some summer camp. It definitely felt like a corny summer camp story when Roxas was on top of me. I think my dad could sense the heaviness in the air, so he changed the subject.

"Candace said that we were invited to the dinner for the party next month, Xion. It's a formal event, so you can wear your dress from Lincoln Day last year. These tickets are really expensive." Dad was always toting Xion around to all of his functions. She was like a prize to him. She was beautiful, even if she didn't wear the trendiest clothes or have the longest hair, my sister was beautiful. Maybe I'm a little biased. My dad was proud of her. She got good grades, she did extracurriculars, and most of all, she was never committed to inpatient.

"What about Axel, dad?"

I immediately looked at my dad's reflection in the rearview mirror and watched him furrow his brow at her question. I couldn't see his eyes because of his expensive Oakleys.

"She wasn't sure, I wasn't sure, when Axel would be back. So she only got tickets for us, Xion. Sorry, Axel."

I felt a little offended. Dad acted like I was going to be institutionalized for the rest of eternity.

"We'll just have to have someone come over and watch you, Axel. We should be able to do it most of the time, but I'm not always free and Xion has things to do too. I don't trust you to be home alone. They told me not to leave you alone for awhile before I can trust you again.

Something about obsessive rumination."

I let those words sink in then reverberate through my skull. I felt the little monster called fury awaken and claw its way out of my gut and into my mouth.

"Why the fuck would I not be able to stay home alone?! I'm almost eighteen years old, dad. I'm almost an ADULT. You're really going to treat me like a child because of what some hokey doctor said? Wow, you really must hate me."

Xion looked back at me with a cautious expression, she didn't say anything. Even though my dad and I fought often, it still got to her. My dad let out an exasperated sigh like he was worn out. I could visibly see him purse his lips. We sat there in awkward silence while I fumed. Finally he spoke because he caught my intense gaze in the mirror.

"I don't hate you. You know that. It's just that you told the doctors you wanted to kill people, Axel. I found bomb-making materials in your room. I just... Can't trust you after that. I can't afford to have you get in trouble anymore."

I intended to retort, but I didn't know exactly what to say. What he said was true. I felt myself

sink. The wrath faded quickly and I felt helpless to my own emotions.

Xion looked back to me, but I didn't meet her eyes. I was sinking. It comes on suddenly sometimes. No matter what pills I take, I fall. I feel like I'm on top of the world one minute, then I'm just nothing. I don't feel real. Just surrounding black. I wish I could control my emotions. I wish these fucking pills would work. And at times like this, I wish I was better. I'm normally pretty comfortable with insanity. It's been around for years, we're old pals. I'm used to it; I don't want it to change. It makes me who I am and if I actually took my medicine consistently or wanted real help, I just wouldn't be Axel anymore. But when this comes on, I feel like I have two options: Die or scream. Scream for help. I hate sounding like some emo little shit when I'm strong as fuck. Stronger than most people. I'm basically a god compared to the general public. I'm above them, a separate level of consciousness. But even gods can feel inferior sometimes I guess. Like when their creations just don't work out or other gods banish them to the underworld for eternity. I don't know, but I do know it happens to me.

I asked Xion for my cigarettes out of the glovebox. My dad didn't dare take those away from me. He's seen the wrath that accompanies nicotine withdrawals. I puffed on cigarettes until we arrived at our humble little abode. Except it's not little or humble. Our tri-level brick house in the nicest part of our shitty little suburb pissed me off. My dad gets paid to lie to people, our house is built on lies.

My room was on the top floor, kind of like an attic, kind of not. My shit was more organized than when I left it. Except my closet. It was open with boxes everywhere. I guess my dad really had found my popcorn supplies. Popcorn is my code word for pipe bombs. You don't want to be talking about them and someone pick up on the conversation. Pro tip: Don't tell your therapist you want to kill people. They have to report you/admit you if they sense you're a serious threat. And since I'm a minor, she had to tell my dad too. I didn't tell her where I hid them, but I guess dad tore the room up looking for them.

Not like I tried really hard to hide them. Dad doesn't normally come in my room. Our maid doesn't either. I used my outstanding Spanish prowess to tell her. "No vienes en mi cuarto, por favor." Easy peasy. Spanish is a class I get pretty good grades in. I was going to take German, but those kids were a little too weird, even for me. Someone once told me that learning German was like re-learning English. No thanks, I can sound angry without speaking German.

Going back to school was a task in and of itself. At least in the hospital I didn't feel too terribly judged and oppressed, even though I felt like it was a contest to see who was the most fucked up. So many little emo fuckers and attention whores.

But high school? Even more attention whores. People that are so shallow that they can't even think for themselves. Fucking sheeple. I wouldn't feel bad if any of them died. The hallways were as balls cold as they normally are, almost as cold as the stares of the denizens of trend. They all knew there was something different about me. They knew I was above them. I was something they couldn't understand. I didn't dress like them, I didn't talk like them. I was doomed to be ostracized forever. I was going to be forever put down. Well, people don't really fuck with me like they used to. I'm tall with a resting asshole face. They still pop off some pure douchebag material, but little do they know they're setting themselves up for their own demise. At my hands. Oh, I can't wait for that day when that black bitch that called me a freak in seventh grade begs for her pathetic life.

My English teacher didn't ask me if I hated him. He looked surprised that I was actually there. My classmates emulated his expression when I walked in. We were on the second chapter of a new book. Jurassic Park or some shit. He split us into groups for discussion. When I pulled my chair up and plopped down, they cringed and sat awkwardly in their little red and chrome chairs. I told them I didn't know jackshit about Jurassic Park except that some dude sifted through shit for a Nokia. They looked at me like I was stupid or an alien or something. Finally someone broke the silence and dug up their balls to say what everyone was dying to know:

"So, uh, where have you been, Axel?"

I snickered and grinned at her. How was I going to put this? Should I tell them the truth or make up some lie about hunting wolverines in Alaska?

“Well, professionals and politically correct assholes like to call it ‘Psychiatric Inpatient,’ but you fucks can call it whatever you like.”

Their mouths were slightly agape, they looked frightened. Like I told them that the Boogeyman was real. Probably partially from the way I said it and the news. Does it really surprise you guys? I do have quite a brash way of explaining things, though. They all should know I’m crazy by now. I mean, now it’s confirmed. I don’t really care, to be honest. Then when the hand of God descends upon them they can say, ‘Oh, why didn’t we see the warning signs?! That kid was fucked!’ Well, I assume conservative asshole parents will say ‘messed up’ or ‘a sick monster’ they don’t want to offend their god or whatever.

They didn’t ask any more questions. I figured that little number would shut them up. In fact, not many people even spoke to me that day. Well, nothing as exciting as English. All of the teachers had gotten the email that I was back in black by then. Literally.

I was garbed in my usual get-up. Black t-shirt, black jeans, and a gray-ish black flannel. I would wear my backwards baseball hat, but we weren’t allowed to wear hats in school. Something about disrespect. Oh, and you can’t forget those black combat boots that I adore. I sure missed them in the looney bin. They have buckles and are laced-up. None of that zip-up pussy shit. Put your boots on like a man, or don’t do it at all.

I went through a couple weeks of school like that. The grueling in-and-out of high school. It was December, that meant Christmas break was soon approaching. We had to take midterms with shit I never learned on it. It’s pretty difficult to teach yourself Pre-Calculus in a hospital (not that I tried) and then try to apply it and catch up in school. You can go fuck yourself Matrices and Radians. Then I go to take my physics test, with material I barely knew, and I forgot to change my calculator back to Degrees. I failed because we were doing vectors and that involves trigonometry. What the fuck ever, Mr. E. He wouldn’t even give me a break. I swear, he only cares about the jocks and jockettes because he’s a coach. He gave me a week to do my bridge project by myself. So much wood glue stuck to shit.

Anyways, I trudged my way through the hall every day and every day I would think about it. I would think about Roxas. It made me feel like a pathetic shitbag because I told myself I didn’t care. I told myself he was a faker little kid and to not get attached to someone like that. But every day I had to fight the urge to go home and look him up on Facebook or something. I just had an overwhelming desire to know about him. Not just his information, but his wellbeing. Was he even still alive?

I finally gave Demyx a call one day after school. Took me long enough. I honestly meant to call him sooner, but things got in the way and I didn’t want the sound of his voice to trigger me to think about Roxas. But I sucked it up. Also, things like my dad taking away my phone for bad grades. I’ve had bad grades before, but it wasn’t up to par for him because of Xion setting the bar so high. But I called Demyx. He didn’t pick up at first and when he did he sounded hesitant. I assumed he didn’t get calls very often. But his voice sounded slightly more monotonous than it did in the hospital. I knew it was because of his schizophrenia, but it kind of startled me. I continued anyway.

“Hello?”

“Hello, sir. Would you by chance have any Tropical Fruit Bubbalicious?”

There was silence over the phone for a couple seconds. I thought he might have forgotten me when I heard a little giggle.

“And some skittles? Hi, Paxil Axel.”

I cackled into the phone. I’m sure it freaked my sister out downstairs because I never talk on the phone and am normally pretty quiet. She didn’t come up, though. I was so glad Demyx remembered me and our joke to boot. We talked on the phone for a good 45 minutes. We planned a time to hang out over the break to smoke pot and stuff. He lived about 30 minutes from me, but I can drive. He can’t drive because of his schizophrenia, but that’s okay. I was beyond excited to see him, but it also brought up the whole Roxas thing inside of me. I felt it bubble up and explode inside of me like Diet Coke and Mentos. But I felt down, I didn’t have the energy to exert to be reckless. But I had to do something, anything. Xion was home, but she was cooking dinner and

didn't have time to babysit me right now. I could smell the food rising through our house. I had to do it. The overwhelming feelings consumed me.

I grabbed my lighter out of the cellophane of my Marlboros. I briefly lit it to make sure it wasn't going to give out on me during the deed. I looked at my already scarred arms and contemplated. Did I really want to mutilate myself again? It didn't matter to me at that point, there was no going back. I lit the lighter and held it and before I could go back, I laid the tip of the lighter to the skin of my inner arm. I held it there until the burning was absolutely unbearable. The endorphins kicked in and the intense pain throbbing in my arm subsided into slight euphoria. I kept going, giving myself seven more burns. I decided eight was a good number, with four on each arm. Little blisters immediately rose to my skin like balloons. I liked the way it looked.

I sat in my room thinking about Roxas and how I wanted to see him again. It felt really masochistic. I wanted to prove to him that I was just as fucked up as him. I sat there in thought until my dad came home just in time for dinner. I didn't bother putting my sleeves down. In fact, I rolled my sleeves of my flannel all the way up to my elbows. Sitting down at the dinner table, I didn't even bother to hide my arms. I saw Xion eye my arms and her eyes lighten with surprise and pain. She frantically looked to my dad. Seeing that look in Xion's eyes brought me back to the hospital. I was there again. Standing in light of the hall. It was a flashbulb memory I would never forget. All that blood and Roxas. I wanted to go back. No, I needed to go back. I... Needed to see him again.

Before my dad could say anything condescending, I burst into alligator tears. I felt nothing worth crying for, but I needed to see Roxas. I didn't will them, I didn't even have to think. His usually apathetic look turned up into a look of astonishment. I rarely cried. Even after all of the shit I've been through. Xion got up to come over to comfort me. I felt bad for dragging her into it.

"Dad, I'm not okay. I'm so unstable. I think you should take me back to the hospital."

I tried my best to sound sincere. I didn't care how selfish it was for my dad and Xion. It was a lot of money per stay, but I just didn't care. I was apathetic to everything that wasn't Roxas related. My dad blinked a couple times and stood up. None of us had even touched our food. He went to leave the room in a rush, but stopped when he reached the hallway. I let out the most obnoxious sob I could muster and a gross snuffle. He wouldn't make eye-contact with me but said softly:

"Fine, get ready. We can go to the emergency room if you can't wait.

His words sounded poisonous, like he regretted saying them. I nodded my head and wiped my nose on my arm as Xion cuddled me. I had not been to the emergency room since the first time I was admitted to inpatient. I didn't know what they would do with me, or if this would be the thing that sent me to residential, but the chance of seeing Roxas again was worth it. I don't know what made me so obsessed with all of the sudden, but when I want something I need to have it at all costs. And this was a cost. It didn't matter what got in my way. He had to still be in the hospital, they don't just let someone who tries to kill themselves IN the hospital out soon. He had to still be there.

Right?

Chapter 5

The ER visit was certainly interesting. They admitted me relatively soon because my dad said I was having some sort of crisis and I guess they saw my record. I wouldn't blame them. They still made me strip and gave me the extra fat gowns because I'm too tall for the normal ones. It hung off of me like a fucking drape. I looked like a flying squirrel when I put my arms out. I bet Xion would have laughed if not for the circumstances.

When they finally got me in a room I reverted back to my normal self. I was excited that my act had worked and I would probably be seeing Roxas very soon. My dad was super pissed, I could tell as soon as I started smiling and joking around with the nurses. They ignored it and asked their usual questions:

"Have you ever intentionally hurt animals?"

"Uh, well, when I was six I sprayed a hamster with that orange spray stuff you use to clean because my dad used to spray me with a squirt bottle when I was bad. Does that count?"

She looked at me appallingly and then she changed her gaze to my father. He looked mortified and shot me a dangerous look:

"I-I was never aware of this ever happening." He looked at me with that angry expression and continued, "I was taught that spraying a child was more beneficial than spanking."

"Well, we see how beneficial that was."

I retorted with a snicker and snarky expression. He looked like an angry Jigglypuff with those puffed out cheeks and all. The nurse ignored us and continued to type on her rolling computer thing. She asked me a multitude of questions as I continuously kicked my legs against the hospital table. My favorite was the fire one:

"Do you ever set fires for your own enjoyment?"

I let out a disturbingly hollow laugh and the nurse looked at me with a worried expression.

"I love this question because I have options. Uh, if you count melting my own flesh with a lighter, then yes. If you mean like a fucking arsonist... Sometimes."

I'm sure I looked really insane because I was smiling the whole time. She didn't even look me in the eye as she continued to type with vigor. Xion was looking at her phone trying to ignore my insanity. That seems to be a common theme with people. I was just having a grand ol' time (Also, I hate assholes that use the word grand seriously). I'm not serious almost ever and I find it funny when people believe that I am. I mean, I'm only kind of joking.

They finished their assessment and left the room. My dad looked beyond peeved at me. He waited until the door was cracked (it wasn't allowed to be shut) before he said:

"Axel, I have been really patient with you. I have bent over backwards to get you everything you need. I will not have you string me along and then humiliate me."

My smile faded as I got a little pissed off. Why does he always have to talk down to me? Why does he always have to patronize me?

"Well, you haven't really bent over backwards to be there for me emotionally. You never visited me in the hospital. You don't ever take me out in public with you. You honestly don't give a shit about me, dad. You only care about your reputation and how many votes you can get. If you could, if it was convenient for you, you would lock me the fuck up so you didn't have to deal with me ever again. You're just like mom. Fuck you."

The anger had escalated rapidly while I was ranting. My knuckles were white from clenching my fists. I wanted to hit something. I didn't care how much of an angsty little shit I sounded like, I was fuming. Xion, who had been sitting there quietly observing the whole time, left the room crying. It still got to her. My dad went after her, but before leaving he looked back at me and said: "Is this what you wanted? You're an embarrassment."

I was alone in the room now. I let those words creep up inside of me. I let it infect me until I felt sick with emotion. I felt so much overwhelming emotion, that at that point, I felt almost nothing. That sounds cliché 'I feel everything and nothing at all,' sounds like some Tumblr bullshit, but I

felt it. I understood. I felt it vibrate in my bones. I didn't know what to do with myself.

I sat there in silence until the nurse came back. My affect must have been flat because she seemed a little creeped out to be alone in the same room as me. She told me to piss in a cup, I guess she expected a witty comment, but I had none. I dejectedly snatched the cup out of her hands and went to the bathroom. When I came back, my dad was there. He had that worn look in his eyes, the same one that I saw in Roxas's mom's eyes. I understood now.

I felt a rollercoaster of emotions in just a few minutes. The doctor came in and in a condescending voice told us that I could go home, but I would be put in a partial hospitalization program until I could go back to school. Partial is when you get to go home at the end of the day, but they basically babysit you all day. I had never been, but I knew it was going to be torture.

I changed back into my regular clothes. That was another thing they said about Partial. We got to wear normal clothes. That news would normally excite me, but I felt nothing. I didn't feel real. I didn't feel like Axel.

My dad didn't say anything to me as we walked to the car where Xion was waiting. She was sitting in the backseat so that I was forced to sit next to dad up front. I wondered if it was planned. I looked back at Xion, but she wouldn't meet my eyes. She casually put her earphones in her ears before I could say anything.

I pouted in my seat while we drove home. It was about a thirty minute drive from this particular Children's. We sat in awkward silence until my dad said:

"Axel, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that. I just get frustrated with you sometimes. It's really quite a financial burden, but that's okay. I want you to be well."

I didn't say anything because I felt nothing. I didn't feel like fighting anymore. I let him believe I was pissed by turning away and not saying anything.

Upon pulling in the driveway, I flung my door open dramatically. I whipped out my trusty copy of the house key, busted through the front door, ignored my whimpering dog, and stomped up the stairs into my room. Slamming my door, I threw my coat somewhere amongst the clutter.

Then it finally hit me. I wasn't going to get what I wanted. I wasn't going to get to see Roxas. All of that bitching and moaning. That fantastic, Oscar winning performance, all for naught. I was going to be able to see my friend... Wait, when did that little emo fucker become my friend in this narrative?

I felt helpless. All of that shit I just did in the last couple hours, down the drain. I didn't try hard enough. I didn't fake it hard enough. And at that moment, I realized I had become the thing I hated. I was the faker. All because of that little blond douchebag.

Self-loathing pooled in my gut. I looked at my reflection with disgust. I scoffed at my appearance. I normally feel pretty confident about myself, I'm a sexy motherfucker, but I was having an existential crisis. My own hair pissed me off. It was straw-like because of the excessive dyeing. And at that moment, too bright and obnoxious, which is my personality on a daily basis. I put it into a really trashy manbun because I was sick of looking at it. Hatred burned through my fingers as I touched my dermals. I had the sudden urge to claw them out, but decided against it because it pissed people off. They have that effect on people, especially old fucks. I picked at the bubbles of flesh on my arms. Poking them until the fluid drained with a painful burst. They were throbbing now and I was satisfied.

I thought about calling Demyx because he said he barely sleeps, but I didn't want to risk it. The thought of waking the Kraken didn't sit well with me. Even though he said his parents were really lenient, I didn't want him to get in trouble with the police for curfew. It states that teenagers can't be out from midnight to five, which is horseshit. I didn't care if I got in trouble for it, to be honest. My dad would just sigh and give me that look while damning me to my room for eternity.

I gathered my cancersticks, my jacket, and keys to skedaddle out of there. And by skedaddle, I mean sneak around the house like a true rogue. I hoped to Cthulhu that my dog was asleep. She wasn't, but I hushed her before she could make any noise. She's a collie Pomeranian mix, so she's a medium sized bundle of energy. It's not a man's dog, but our personalities mesh sometimes.

After stuffing Lady back into the house as I left, I was on my way. At first I was trying to be relatively quiet to not wake up my dad, but as soon as I was in my car, I slammed the door shut. I

hoped he woke up. But maybe not, he listened to a Rush Limbaugh-esque radio station to brainwash him in his sleep or whatever. Omlette du Fromage?

I had an almost full tank of gas that I didn't have to pay for. I could have gone anywhere within reason. But where the fuck did I go? Up the street, it was a five minute drive from my house. I went to the library. It was obviously closed, but the stairs to the clock tower weren't. The library was a giant brick building that was built in a faux Federalist Americana style. My favorite part as a child was the puppets in the children's section. I mean, I still love to play with puppets and intimidate young children, but my favorite part now was the clock tower.

Behind the library is a small park with a stage that they hold concerts at. Now, I never said they were good concerts. High school and middle school concert and jazz bands. That's all the creative minds of our suburb can produce. And guess who approves the summer concert series? Yep, you guessed it, good ol' dad. He has a way with sucking the fun out of everything. How many times can you listen to a middle school rendition of E.T.? Every time it makes me want to phone home myself. Phone my dad and yell at him for his shitty decisions. We're even now, dad. We're even. I ascended the staircase behind that nicely decorated porch with the hanging vines and stuff. The stairs were long, long enough that not a lot of people bothered climbing them. Besides stoners that needed a good smoking spot. They're mostly middle school/freshmen that don't even inhale correctly. I used to be one of those kids, though I hate to admit it. Back when I had friends, back when I was normal. But fuck being normal, normal is boring. And I mean that in the least trendy Tumblr asshole way possible.

I reached the top where there was a wraparound patio that was under an overhang that worked as an awning. The clock sat on the awning. There was a fence around the patio so that people couldn't jump or fall or whatever. It was death either way.

I caught my breath and leaned on the railing. I looked out my town. I could see straight to the high school. It was dark, but I could still make out that blocky, prison-like shape. It was pretty symbolic. I looked up at the purple sky. It was purple because of the city lights or whatever. It was too cloudy to see the stars, or even the moon. Which was probably a good thing because I've been paranoid about the moon falling since 2000. I was on a clock tower.

I stared into space for what felt like an eternity. I let the cold air whip at my face. My nose was numb and it had started to run. My hands trembled as I lit up a cigarette. My fingers didn't want to bend and that was when I was made aware of how cold it actually was. I didn't really mind, though. Even though I get sadder in the winter. I guess it's the lack of sunlight that does it. I read somewhere that it's a disorder called SAD. I don't know exactly what it stands for, but I do know that psychologists have a sick sense of humor sometimes. Like I'm one to talk, though.

I was thinking about leaving when I felt something come over me. I hated how I could go from being stable and fine to feeling like I had nothing to lose. At that moment, I felt worthless. Nothing mattered except the cushy cement of the parking lot.

I felt it. The wave of danger passed over me. I could have done it, you know? I could have jumped. In one swift movement I climbed onto the railing. I held myself steady by grabbing the overhang above me. I looked down and out at the little specks of street light in the sea of darkness. They were like little pearls of color contrasted against the black. I was seriously considering, but then it hit me. Xion's face. The way her face would contort into a look of anguish when she found out. The tears she would shed for the loss of my worthless life. It sickened me. But when I saw those cerulean blues in my mind's eye, I couldn't help myself. They weren't Xion's anymore, they were Roxas's. That little angelic shitbag had infiltrated my thoughts.

I stepped down from the railing that acted as my balance beam between life and death. I couldn't off myself. No, not now. It meant that they would have won. They all would have gotten the best of me. I was above all of them. And if I did off myself, they would all say how much they adored me and how I didn't deserve to die. Which is total bullshit. Not one person in that school gives a shit about me. And that, at that moment, was my reason for living. I was going to live just out of spite.

I sighed as I looked at that ugly purple sky again and descended down the stairs. It was about four thirty in the morning when I got back to my car. I sat in my own comfortable silence for several

minutes before I took down my obscenely trashy manbun. My hair unraveled in a wavy, curly mess. I scoffed at it. I needed to shower, but I wasn't really feeling it. That happens when you feel like shit. That's also one of the ways they gauge how mentally fucked you are. I was about a nine at that point.

I hadn't taken my medication in weeks. My dad didn't pay enough attention to realize that the amount of pills in the bottle wasn't changing. My dad sure wouldn't miss if I took one of his Percocets, though. They're "for his back." Or he's just a pillhead, I haven't decided yet.

I drove back home, taking my sweet ass time. Partially because I didn't want to go home, partially because I didn't feel like fucking with the cops about curfew. I mean, the police could just say I attacked them like so many other mentally ill kids, but then someone would just blow it way out of proportion and make me a martyr of police brutality which is a responsibility I'm not ready for. I pulled into my driveway where my dad's inviting bedroom light was shining. Great. He didn't get up until eight, and it was almost five. I knew he was up so I didn't even try to be quiet about my entrance. In fact, I was rather extravagant with it, just to spite him. As I burst through the door I bellowed:

"Oh, Lucy! I'm home!"

Dad was standing at the top of the stairs waiting. I heard the floorboards creak over the living room, I had woken Xion up too. My dad zoomed down the stairs with an extremely pissed look on his face. He had his Coke bottle glasses on that he only wore when he was too sick or tired to put his contacts in. My smile faded as he burned me with that gaze. I saw Xion's head poke around the corner. Even from here I could see the sleep in her eyes. Her hair was a curly mess like mine was in the morning. Although, mine just needs a good brushing to get those annoying little kinks out, she straightened hers. It's the curse of the La Rizza family.

"Hello, dad. Lovely night we're having."

I smiled as I spoke, hoping to lighten the mood.

"Axel, why do you do this to me? Just... Go to bed. I'll deal with you in the morning."

He did an about-face and marched while I tried not to be a smartass and correct him about it already being morning. He made it halfway up before looking over his shoulder at me. Xion turned and went back to her room sensing the excitement was over. I contemplated being more of a little shit, but I decided I'd been enough of a huge shit for one night. It could wait until tomorrow. All of my angsty bullshit was kind of tiring, you know?

Going to sleep was more a task than I had anticipated because of the throbbing in my arms. It wasn't unbearable, but it had been awhile and the endorphins had worn off. The large fiber pain was setting in with a dull pulse, a pain you associate with stubbing your toe most of the time. I mean, that happened a lot too. I'm clumsy as fuck, but I'm working on it. Can't be going ultraviolent when you're accident prone.

Since the doctors said that I couldn't go back to school until I graduated from Emo University, I got to sleep in. Which was nice for once. What was not nice was that my dad called my extremely Italian Roman Catholic grandma to watch me like I was six again. She was sitting in our den; no one warned me she would be there. Good thing I was clothed. She was reading some knitting magazine, typical grandma things. She came up to hug me, barely coming up to my chest. Letting me go she looked at me in disdain. My hair was still wet from my shower and my roots were growing in slightly. I was wearing a black wife-beater because I hadn't put my flannel on yet. You could see my phoenix wing tattoos on both of my shoulders. As she continued to look, she grew more and more appalled. She took a strand of my hair in her dainty little fingers and said, "Oh, Alexander. What have you done to yourself? I haven't seen you in ages. I remember when you were a good kid..."

I noticeably cringed as my grandma proceeded to call me by my birth name. No one called me Alexander. Not my dad, not my mom, not Xion, not my teachers. No one. Not even when they're mad at me. Alexander wasn't me. I was Axel. I abhorred Alexander; it was so plain and trendy. Grandma wasn't done, she kept going:

"Johnny never calls me anymore. Looks like he doesn't need his old mom now that he's a big mayor."

Italians are huge on family and my dad didn't have more than two kids. He never invited grandma over for dinner now that he was busy with the city. Plus he hated pasta. We were bad Italians. She went on all day. Not just her bitching, but she talked about all of her grandma hobbies too. I think she was just lonely since grandpa died. She told me all about her cats and her knitting. She asked me why I gave up piano and tenor saxophone. I rolled my eyes and told her that it wasn't my thing. I didn't mention that the band directors hated me because I was lazy, belligerent, and talked too much. I ran too many laps in those four months. The only extra-curricular I was good at was Debate Team. I stopped going after I wasn't elected to a position. I guess I'm more like my father than I realized. Except, unlike my father, I gave up.

My dad never did talk to me about my late night escapade. I feel like he got back at me by having grandma watch me every day for the next week while they got the insurance straightened out. It wasn't so bad aside from her talking about my eternal life sentence to hell. Oh, and she made me watch the shopping channel and public access. Which meant the Hour of Power. It made me think of Roxas. It disgusted me that I associated ordinary things with him all the time. Like the color of purple or band t-shirts. I hadn't even paid attention to which band it was. Just band t-shirts in general; which I had a lot of. I had to tell myself that these thoughts were creepy and unhealthy. My dad informed me on Friday that I was accepted into the Partial program and that I started Monday. Let me tell you, I was overcome with joy. I was so sick of grandma's constant harassment about my dermals. I can't take them out, grandma. That's the point.

He did fail to mention that I couldn't drive myself and that it started at eight A.M like high school. I was a little pissed when he came to get me at six thirty. He said it was because I took forever to get ready and it was a forty-five minute drive. It was in Downtown Cincinnati and you had all of that commuter traffic.

It was eerily quiet during the drive. Dad didn't turn on his Republican propaganda, sports, or his 70s stoner music. He didn't say anything to me; he didn't say anything at all. He hadn't said much to me in the last week. I couldn't decide if it was because he was just done or if he really didn't care anymore. I pretended like it didn't bother me and kept my gameface on. New doctors to bullshit to and make them believe I am full of shit.

We pulled up to that hospital I've been to a couple times. He didn't even look at me when we exited the car and as I grinned at him. Well, I don't know if he did or not, I couldn't see his eyes past those expensive sunglasses. It wasn't even that sunny out on that dreary December day.

We arrived at seven fifty-two, so there were plenty of kids waiting in the lobby to be let into the actual hospital part. I joined their ranks and sat my ass down in one of those slightly uncomfortable, armrest-less waiting room chairs. My dad filled out paperwork and sat across from me. I didn't dare try to make conversation. He finished just they came to retrieve us for therapeutic hell. He didn't say anything as I enthusiastically waved goodbye to him.

We went up in the elevators, all twelve of us. Nine patients and three counselors. It was a little crowded, even for my skinny ass. We walked past my old pal 3B and I smirked to myself. Hello, darkness, my old friend. We then past some office things and what looked like to be family intervention rooms. There was a big window which belonged to some staff office or something. Ugly paper Mache Christmas trees littered the white brick walls.

It got even worse when we entered the classroom. There were corny motivational posters and children's drawings taped to the walls. A bookshelf full of kid friendly games like CandyLand and Apples-to-Apples sat tall against one wall. It was also filled with approved literature. 'Damn, can't read my copy of Mein Kampf here' I thought to myself. Wow, was I funny sometimes. The carpet was an ugly blue speckled with yellow and orange. And to top it all off, there were three tables, set up cafeteria style. Oh boy! More opportunities to be a social pariah!

We had to give them our cell phones and they locked them in a drawer in the office. They also made us put our backpacks on the lowest tier of the kid-tastic bookshelf. They checked them to make sure we didn't bring anything illegal or dangerous. Please, if I wanted to kill you people, I would find a way.

Some nurse took me to get my weight and blood pressure checked. She also asked if I was vaccinated and if I was sexually active. I told her I could be for a price and winked. Lightly

smiling she carried on her job. She was trying to hide the fact that I was amusing. It made me pretty happy, actually.

I returned to the room and it seemed like everyone knew each other because they were all sitting at the same table. What was this? Fucking Cheers? There was one kid sitting at the other table and she had the body of a nine year old Chinese boy. I figured that was about how old she was, so I didn't even think about it.

They let me keep my hat on, which was rather nice of them. My cigarette cellophane crinkled in my pocket as I sat down. I felt a wave of nervousness wash over me, but it subsided when only Itty-bitty titties noticed.

They were about to take attendance when I heard footsteps down the hallway. I didn't really give a shit; I figured it was a counselor or the nurse coming back. So I didn't even look up when the footsteps turned into scuffs across the carpet. I continued to fiddle-fart around with some markers on the table. My Crayola light-saber was almost complete when I heard it:

"Sorry I'm late."

I dropped the marker sword and they split with the contact of the table. I looked up. I started slowly at the shoes. They were dirty black Converse that built up to too big black jeans and a baseball style t-shirt with $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves. But they didn't look like $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves because of the bandages that wrapped up the arms. I kept going and lo-and-behold...

It was him.

Those ocean blues, that stupid looking cowlick. All there. But this time there was a new expression. Surprise. His face didn't change too much. His mouth was open, eyes a little wider, and an eyebrow raised under his mop of hair. I must have looked really fucking stupid because everyone was staring at me. His look of surprise changed to one of mild amusement. I couldn't say anything. He was here. In the flesh.

"Oh, hi. Didn't expect to see you here."

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

I couldn't speak. I couldn't get my mouth to formulate sentences. All of that effort I put forth, all of the excessive brooding had led up to this moment. I looked on at him like he wasn't real, like he was a dream. I could see him starting to get uncomfortable from my gaze of wonder. I finally caught myself as he sat down at my table. Trying to put on that aloof air I had at inpatient was more difficult than I had anticipated. That smug little expression he had as he briefly glanced at me was more than I could take. There was now something extremely... Intoxicating about him. It sounded super mega gay in my head, and that scared me, but was there really anything I could do? I had gone from detesting his existence to pining for him like a little bitch. My wish was definitely granted.

They took attendance and I was last because I was the new kid. Eternal gratefulness washed over me when they called me 'Axel' instead of 'Alexander.' Good ol' dad saving me from a shitload of embarrassment.

After taking attendance we were instructed to sit in a circle and introduce ourselves to each other. Which seemed asinine as fuck because these kids already knew each other like childhood friends or whatever. You would believe it if you saw it. It was like a Kodak moment, everyone was smiling and cheery. Which is weird for a hospital setting. Even Roxas was smiling as an obnoxious looking kid in a winter hat told some lame joke. Blondie actually held himself with a grace and composure I guess I didn't notice before. It was like he knew the drill. It made me feel pretty inferior. Which made me feel even worse because I was so above him at inpatient. I owned that shit.

I fidgeted in those slightly uncomfortable chairs that were the same as the waiting room. We went around stating how we were feeling and why we were there. Briefly, though. Didn't want to trigger anyone or whatever. There were a lot of whiny 'I'm depressed' spiels and 'My parents are worried about my anger.' Then me. I decided to go all out and with a smile I said:

"Hi, I'm Axel. And I'm an alcoholic." I paused to laugh at my own joke. "No, but really. I like to set fires, plan massacres, and make people feel uncomfortable overall. Nobody takes me seriously, so you shouldn't either."

Everyone's faces seemed to scream at me 'What the fuck?' I was mildly amused. I tend to have a problem with saying things I shouldn't and speaking my mind. (If you haven't noticed already.) I just couldn't help myself. I had nothing to hide, anyways.

As I scanned the room, mildly satisfied with my handiwork, my eyes met with Roxas' again. This was a different Roxas than the one I met at the big boy hospital. I don't know what happened, but that dull-eyed little shit was gone. Well, he was still a little shit, but his eyes were afire with something I couldn't quite place. He certainly didn't look bored.

The counselors were scribbling frantically trying to record everything I had said. In her fake, phony nice voice, a counselor urged us to continue. Which was probably a good thing because all noise in the room had ceased since I had spoken. Roxas continued to keep eye-contact with me as he said:

"I'm feeling fine today. Great, actually. I'm here because I self-harm, tried to kill myself, but was compliant enough to be graced with your shining faces for the past couple days."

The last phrase was stated with such an over-enthusiasm that I wanted to barf. His naturally flat affect had only slightly shifted to depict a feeling of excitement. It just kind of looked like when a high person is trying to excitedly tell you a story. His eyes didn't go wide, his face stayed the same, but those eyebrows rose so that they disappeared under his hair. His mouth was cocked into a half-grin thing. Which led me to discover that he had braces. Which is weird that I didn't notice that before, especially with his tongue stuffed down my throat. They were blue. Seriously, how did I not notice this? It made me feel even creepier about my feelings because my sister had braces in 7th grade. She was twelve at the time. Oh, Dionysus. I was in for it.

We finished going around in that awkward little circle thing. It was really only awkward because every time I would make eye-contact with the person talking they would immediately look away. It made me feel like a leper, but it was also slightly amusing.

They told us all the useless bullshit we would be doing all of that week. We actually had two times during the day to do homework. I was enthralled, believe me. More time to do schoolwork my teachers weren't sending and I didn't understand. I was honestly afraid I wasn't going to graduate at this point. My teachers had given up on me.

The counselors also said something about a lot of group therapy, horticulture, and free time at the end of the day. I laughed at horticulture. One, because it sounded like 'whore' and I am a child. And two, because fucking with plants is not my idea of therapy. New age eclectic therapy bullshit. Upon moving back to our tables, Roxas didn't vote to sit with the other shitheads. He sat at my table with the titless wonder. I think she said he name was Larxene or something equally as stupid. She had a resting bitch face and the attitude to match it. I didn't really want to be around her, but there was nowhere else to go.

We were given a multitude of tasks that weren't necessarily therapeutic, but mostly distractions. Our first assignment was to 'make a town of your own' with rules and government and shit. And guess what? The lazy bastards divided us into tables.

With a huge piece of paper laid in front of us, we were instructed to draw our town, name it, and write the laws. It seemed like we were in 3rd grade again, but I was sure they were going to teach us some corny lesson with it. It theoretically should have been easier for us because there were only three of us. Which meant only three people trying to have their ideas heard, but no. We sat there in silence for several seconds before we saw a counselor eye us. A glance was shared as Roxas and I stood up in unison. He took the initiative and made his way over to the marker box, grabbed a handful of them indiscriminately, and dropped them on the table. They rolled in every direction; I made an effort to stop them from rolling off. He picked up a green marker, scribbled something quickly, and capped it. I walked up behind him to read what he wrote.

'X-ville.'

I stared at it. Real hard.

"What the fuck? How did you come up with that?"

I couldn't see his face, but I didn't really need to. His tone of voice said it all:

"Well, you see. We all have X's in our names. That's it. Did you expect me to be clever? I don't see you giving me a better suggestion, so we're keeping it. 'Kay? 'Kay."

He was so sassy, but that honestly didn't surprise me. He did ask if I was going Super Saiyan the first day we met. I briefly thought of how sassy we would be together, but I pushed that down. Being homosexual was not on my list of things to do today.

I continued to watch from behind as he drew what looked like a village. Damn, I couldn't help myself.

"What is this? A village for ants?!"

I said it in my best imitation voice possible. I didn't expect him to get it, but was pleasantly surprised.

"You're right. This drawing needs to be at least... Three times bigger than this!"

I laughed. I actually laughed. It was genuine, not a sardonic, mocking laugh. I was satisfied. He could snap back quotes at me. No, it had to be a fluke. A lot of people have seen Zoolander and it's a rather popular Internet meme. I kept telling myself I had to detach from him, but it was going to be hard if he was funny. I'm into that shit. I was going to test him again, but was interrupted by him:

"Okay, so we need to establish rules. I vote we copy the Bill of Rights and call it a day."

"How about we just put some obvious ones like 'don't rape' or 'don't be a little shit'."

It brought me such joy to fuck with him. He still didn't turn around, but I saw his ears tinge pink. He didn't falter or stutter when he said:

"Welp, looks like you can't be in the town then."

It was followed by a snicker that I assumed was from Roxas because Larxene didn't look amused. I was offended. I am definitely not a little shit or a rapist. He was the one that came onto me. No

matter what I felt for him, I gradually got more pissed off as he wrote in ugly purple marker things like, 'don't steal' and 'freedom of speech.' His handwriting was sloppier than mine, and mine is some weird hybrid of cursive and print.

"You couldn't be in the town either. You're a pro at being a little shit, you... Little shit!"

Wow, Axel. So graceful and witty. I immediately regretted saying it. He finally turned his head to me.

"Really? That was the best you could come up with? I'm disappointed."

His stare lingered for a couple seconds. I guess he expected me to say something. I was mad at him, but I still felt that disgusting feeling at the bottom of my stomach. My feelings for him were like bile and I struggled to keep it down lest I throw up all over the place. It sickened me that I barely knew this kid. What if he fucking sucked as a person? It was almost like an obsession, which is common with my addictive personality. I've had a couple relationships before, but not this kind of longing to even be friends with someone. My own thoughts grossed me out. I sound like a young adult romance novel. Watch out, John Green. You've got some competition. The Fault in my Religiously Internalized Hatred for Gays and Subsequently Myself. Yeah, best seller. As I continued to stare at his babyface, it contorted a little into an expression of discomfort. He turned his head back to the paper and nothing more was said to me as he asked Larxene for suggestions.

My mouth was glued shut as Roxas continued to scrawl out our basic freedoms. He then proceeded to explain "our decisions" in a phony enthusiastic voice. I rolled my eyes. Nothing was said on my part. For once.

Going through the motions of the day, they never did tell us the lesson associated with that town. It was busy work, I knew it.

After classroom time, which was stare at the wall time for Axel, it was lunch. I wasn't there to pick the day prior, so they gave me whatever they had. Which happened to be the special of the day. Chicken Parmesan. Disgusting. And it's not because I'm an Italian with high standards. It was actually disgusting. Twinky was standing and talking to some ginger with zip-up combat boots. I internally scoffed at her. I guess Roxas had a thing for redheads. I was slightly jealous. They laid Roxas' plate on the table and he made his way back. He gave me a look that was something between disdain and his resting face. I didn't know how to feel as I took a huge bite of dry, tasteless spaghetti. I smacked my lips and made a gagging noise.

"You know, you'd think I would be used to the shit they call food here by now."

Looking at his plate I saw a peanut butter sandwich and an apple. Well, that was better than what they gave me.

"I didn't order this apple. What the fuck? Apples get stuck in my braces."

I snickered. What a little nerd.

"Don't be a bitch. Maybe they'll cut it up for you before nappy time."

It amused the hell out of me to be condescending to this kid. It became even more amusing the moment his eyes became dangerous. He was pissed.

"Maybe I'll cut your dick off before nappy time."

He finished with a smirk. I furrowed my brow. I furrowed it as much as it could furrow. What the fuck?

"I think you've mistaken the words 'suck' and 'cut.'"

"Be careful, I use teeth."

"Feisty, I like that."

We had gotten progressively louder as we spoke. The other table had turned to us as Larxene got up to sit on the floor by the other kids. Oops.

"Look what you did. You scared her off."

He was grinning. I was taken aback by how fucking cute he was.

"Uh, well. I am kind of intimidating."

Triumph seemed to spread across his face because of my less than clever response. I averted my eyes and tried not to stare as I stuffed the gross sludge down my throat. I wasn't comfortable with my feelings. Not at all. Something about being raised Catholic does that to you.

Horticulture came and went. The trek in the cold as balls weather to the greenhouse that was the temperature of actual balls was boring. The hanging plants that I kept bumping into in that toddler sized greenhouse were annoying. But watching Roxas try to transpose plants was like watching a small child try to put the square block in the circle slot. It gave me a good chuckle considering I was no better. I had deathtouch. I guess I always have that Bow of Nylea on me. Damn, dude. Dealing two damage to your flying creature.

The end of that first day soon approached. It had been overall uneventful aside from the occasional swoon over Blondie. I hadn't considered myself gay before this, but damn I think I've been turned to the dark side. Where they don't have cookies, but nicely embroidered pillows. It was the end of the day so it was free time. They led us down to some room with a bunch of shit. Mostly a ping-pong table and a pool table. Oh boy. Some counselor suggested basketball and looked right at me. I rolled my eyes as he asked me to join.

"I know I'm really tall and all that, but believe me, you do not want me to play basketball with you. I am clumsy."

He tried his damndest to goad me into it, but I voted to stay and play ping-pong with my new fellow bottle ginger adorned in zip-up combat boots. She looked uneasy as I quickly approached her. Gingey was sitting with Roxas talking about some pseudo-edgy book about mental illness that I didn't care about. I remembered her saying something about having an eating disorder and cutting herself or whatever. I figured that's why Roxas talked to her. She seemed like an attention-whore faker, but I needed an excuse to get persistent counselor basketball guy off my dick.

"Hey, sweetcheeks." I winked. Ew. "Come play ping-pong with me. Uh, please?"

Her disgusted expression at 'sweetcheeks' satisfied the fuck out of me.

"Uh... I don't really want t--"

"Great, let's go."

Slowly standing up, she followed me to the table of the ping-pong variety. But not without giving Roxas an extremely nervous expression. He shrugged his shoulders.

I served that ball with such a force that there was no way she could have hit it. She chased after it and I chuckled. She served it back at me and with my extraordinary ping-pong prowess I missed. The ball rolled in Roxas' direction. Dejectedly, I went to fetch it. I guess that ball had it out for me because it kept rolling until it was under his table. He didn't make a motion to get it, so I got on my hands and knees. It was an extremely awkward experience, especially when I was crawling out and made eye-contact with him. If that wasn't awkward enough he whispered:

"This a good angle for you."

The cocky smile was delayed, but it definitely appeared on that faux-angelic face. I don't get easily embarrassed, but damn. Was he trying to do this to me? I stuttered as I spoke:

"Shut the fuck up."

My face burned as I hit that ping-pong ball so hard I swore it broke the sound barrier. That little fucker was toying with me and I wasn't having it. I slammed my paddle down and sauntered over to the Roxster and landed my ass in a plastic chair next to him. He was drawing something or other and was pretty into it because he ignored my presence. I grabbed a colored pencil and drew a large penis on the paper over whatever the fuck he was drawing. I waited. Waited for the blow up.

It didn't come. He looked me right in the eyes, only moving them to glance at the paper occasionally, as he added details to the dick. His gaze intensified as he drew the semen. This kid was definitely not like other kids. I had no idea how to handle him. All I knew is that I wanted to try.

He added veins to it. Oh, Artemis. I snatched the paper and drew a really basic mouth next to it. Then I mimicked him, only looking down briefly as I wrote:

'This could be us but you playin'

He looked at it intensely before he laughed. I definitely did not expect an actual laugh. I expected him to scoff at me or whatever.

"You're trash."

I was also expecting an 'ew' or 'in your dreams.'

“The trashiest.”

I poked him with my elbow as I said it. He didn't even falter, I didn't even stop him. Damn.

“I've noticed.”

What the fuck? I was just playing along. I wasn't actually trashy, was I? I suddenly felt insecure as pushy basketball guy came back with his horde of problem children. Some schizophrenic thirteen-year-old that styles his hair like a frat boy high-fived the dude as he herded us back to that stuffy classroom.

Everyone was getting their shit ready to go and I stared at Roxas. I debated asking him if he wanted to hang out with Demyx and I Christmas Eve day because we didn't have to go to this bullshit, but I lost my chance as he left. I really wanted to know how he actually felt. If this was a game or if he was actually interested. I had to know.

Dad didn't ask about my day. When I got in the car it was blasting the local sports talk station. I tried to start a conversation, but was ignored immediately by a phone call from one of his political goonies. Rolling my eyes, I proceeded to dramatically jam my headphones in my ears to drown my lack of parental love in angsty 90s music. With Eddie Vedder's raspy voice blaring in my ears, I slipped away. I could see, but nothing was real. I think they call it 'depersonalization' or something. Whatever it was, I kinda liked it.

The couple of days before Christmas at partial were far less exciting than the first. Roxas kept his distance, but never failed to send a snarky expression my way. He seemed to be becoming close with pussy combat boot girl. I learned her name was Kairi. Seeing them laughing together at the other table made me beyond envious. What if he was starting to dig her? What if he really was just fucking with me? I felt so small and insignificant hearing her annoying fucking laugh across the room.

Meanwhile, Larxene and I had gotten on talking terms. That day was a little different, though. The day prior I had learned that she was thirteen with anger problems. But didn't we all have anger problems at thirteen? Anyways, she was garbed in a low-cut shirt and a push-up bra. Now, how did I know that? She wasn't completely titless today.

I swallowed hard at the way she looked me up and down when I walked in that day. I gave her a nervous half-smile. She was wearing copious amounts of eyeliner that I noticed upon sitting next to her.

“Hi, Axel.”

Her voice was so sweet it was giving me diabetes. Eh.

“Hey, Larxene.”

She was staring at me, and when I looked over, Roxas was too. What was this? A fucking zoo? Am I some kind of rare wonder of nature?

“Can I ask you something, Axel?”

I internally flinched at the way she said my name, she was normally a bitter cunt.

“Uh, sure.”

She batted her eyelashes that were coated in mascara. Her eyelashes weren't normally this luscious.

“Do you want to hang out later?”

Blinking a couple times, I asked her to repeat herself and she did. I looked everywhere but her. I figured she wanted a response, and as I was about to tell her no, my eyes met with babyface's. He was mid-laugh with Kairi.

“Yeah, sure. When?”

Her eyes lit up. She was obviously excited and it kind of creeped me out, to be honest. She gave me her address and the time. I knew this wasn't going to end well, but a part of me wanted to make Roxas jealous. All we would probably do is make-out and watch a movie because her parents would be home. That did not sound like a good time to me. Maybe I could blow her off last minute?

Since this was the last day before Christmas Eve they were lenient with what we did. The day consisted of Larxene staying up my ass and talking about how much fun we were going to have. She was talking, but I wasn't paying attention. I honestly did not care.

I still wanted to ask Roxas to hang, but I couldn't. He was probably busy anyways. Demyx and I just aren't because we're losers and his parents don't really care. I briefly wondered why that was. Roxas and I never did speak that day. And I didn't know if he'd be back after Christmas. That alone made me anxious as fuck. I tried so hard to see him again, and then when I got the chance, I was going to blow it. But I honestly had no idea what I could have done about it. He made me feel so un-Axel like.

We were all in the lobby getting ready to leave. Larxene was sitting next to me as I waiting for my dad to get here. I dreaded that silent drive back home. Roxas got up to leave when his mom walked in, which in turn caused Kairi to stand up. She hugged him. I stared at her intensely. So intensely I could have burned holes in her skull if I was Cyclops. She was taller than him. I don't know if it was because of the combat boots or if she really was. What a weird couple they would be.

I resented her now. That bitch just started a war. She had a distressed look on her face which made Roxas turn to give me a questioning look. I continued to shoot daggers in her direction. I stood up, grabbed Larxene, and took her into an embrace. Blondie looked confused as my dad walked in the lobby.

"Well, it's nice to see that you're making friends, Axel."

I immediately released her from my grasp built on fake affection and I saw this starry-eyed teenage girl. I honestly could have barfed at that moment. I told her I'd see her later in a less than enthusiastic tone.

Larxene's house was actually only ten minutes from mine in the trashiest part of our county. It was a one-story house with a chain-link fence. There were a bunch of gaudy Christmas lights adorning the house and yard. The animatronic Sesame Street characters and dogs in Santa hats stared at me with their dark, dead eyes. It unnerved the fuck out of me, more so than I already was. I briefly wondered why the lights were off if people were home, but decided they just wanted to conserve electricity.

I like to consider myself pretty punctual, so I was there almost exactly at seven. Before I had even gotten to the front door, it was open with a little blonde head poking out from it. Her smile was miles long as I continued the death march. Trudging into her humble abode, I was surprised to find that no one else was home. I was greeted with a hug. I returned it with a church hug. You know those hugs that the people you don't really know at church give you? Those really shitty side hugs. Yeah, that.

She looked up at me. Her eyes were blue, but not the pretty kind of blue. They were murky, swamp water blue. I wasn't really digging this, but she took my hand led me to her room. The walls were yellow with posters sloppily hung on them. She had a print-out of Ted Bundy next to a Kurt Cobain poster. Wow, this kid really thought she was edgy, huh? She probably didn't even know who Ted Bundy really was. It actually pissed me off a great deal. I really wanted to leave. The first ploy I could think of came to my mind.

"So, where are your parents? I wouldn't want you to get in trouble for having me over."

She smiled at me with a pitiful excuse for seduction mixed in there.

"Does it really matter, Axel? I know why you're here."

Boy, I felt awkward. She plopped down on her bed and motioned for me to sit down. Seeing her with the fucking Pikachu pillow on the bed helped the guilt get real comfortable inside of me. I knew that I shouldn't, I really did. But I did it anyways. I sat down on the edge of the bed which prompted her to climb onto my lap and mash her fucking teeny-bopper lips against mine. They tasted like artificial peaches and faux virginity. She was Lewis and Clark as she explored my mouth with her tongue. I just kind of sat there and debated the consequences of statutory rape. They didn't seem too dire because I reciprocated. It wasn't because I was into her. It was because I wanted to staunch these feelings that I had for Roxas bubbling in my stomach in a few minutes of guilty pleasure.

We ended up going all out. It was a homerun. Way past third base, all the way home. And we were safe. In cliché baseball terms and literally. I was not having babymama drama yet. Every guy that isn't a piece of shit should carry a condom in his wallet at all times. It should be a law or

something.

It was okay, she definitely was not a virgin, but not experienced enough to know to cut out that fake moaning shit. She also called me 'daddy' on several occasions. Which really fucked me up. While we were going at it, I didn't look at her almost at all. When my eyes weren't closed, they were staring up at Mr. Bundy on the wall. At one point I had contemplated following in his footsteps.

I got up and threw the loveglove away and sat back down on the bed. It prompted her to wrap her arms around me. The room smelled like sex and cheap air freshener. It gagged me as I pulled her off. I made the walk of shame to pick up my clothes and looked on at her. She looked hurt, but I honestly didn't care. She knew this was going to happen. I didn't know if she was going to be the type of girl to cry rape if something didn't go her way, but it was whatever at that point. The deed was done.

"You're leaving already?"

Her voice was soft. I didn't feel bad for her.

"Yeah, uh, thanks for your... Hospitality."

And without another word I left. I knew it was going to be really weird at partial after Christmas. But I didn't care about her. My thoughts were on Roxas. He didn't give a shit about me. I was just convenient for him at inpatient. He probably wasn't even gay; he just wanted to fuck with me because I have feelings for him. What the fuck ever.

As soon as I got into my car, it hit me like a tidal wave. I felt extremely bad about what I did. She probably has a shitty dad and daddy issues associated with that. I debated going back in, but decided it was better this way.

I started my car and left. I seriously contemplated killing myself. I wasn't going to face the imminent jail time for statutory rape. And I felt bad morally as well. But I decided to drown my sorrows in a bottle of expensive whiskey. My dad wouldn't miss it.

I called Demyx and drunkenly told him what happened. I don't remember what he said, but I'm sure it was reassuring because I didn't go swallow a whole bottle of Ibuprofen to accompany my liquor. I was going to see him the next day. We were going to meet at the government building, which is weird, but it was a good meeting point between the two of us. I had something to look forward to. That, and Demyx's soothing mystery words, were what got me through that night of self-loathing.

I was a shitbag. Not just because I humped n' dumped a thirteen-year-old that I met at the hospital with daddy problems, but because the whole time I could only think of one thing.

Fuckin' Roxas.

I was pathetic.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

I was hungover beyond all fuck when I trekked into the balls cold that morning. I pulled up to the courthouse at approximately 9:55 AM on Christmas Eve. We agreed to meet at 10 ish because the building closed at noon. I had no idea where, though. Demyx had a problem with being specific. I parked in not the garage; that shit costs money. So some gravel parking lot behind a giant billboard promoting diabetes it was. I wore a sweatshirt that day in place of my usual trench coat. It was a horrible idea because the wind seeped through the fabric like an acid or something. It chilled my skinny torso and arms. Self-immolation seemed like a fantastic idea at this time, but I remembered that it didn't necessarily guarantee death. I would say some cliché and poetic thing about how it would have chilled my soul, but my heart was already made of ice or whatever, but I was above that.

After looking for Demyx for a good ten minutes, I stumbled upon the alternate entrance to the building in the back. It was under a breezeway that connected the garage and the main building. I remember going through that breezeway at some point in my life and recalled it smelling like stale hobo pee. It actually didn't even surprise me.

Speaking of hobos, there were a shit ton of homeless people scattered around the area and even more nicely dressed office workers smoking. I pulled out a cigarette because I'm a conformist asshole and seeing someone else smoke made me want to do it. That's probably the reason they didn't have commercials advertising cigarettes anymore. Only those lung cancer and 'Above the Influence' commercials that insist you'll become gay if you smoke pot once or whatever.

As I approached, I noticed there was music. And with my astute skills of observation, I figured it was Demyx. The soft twang of acoustic guitar bliss filled the air and my fucking soul. It was a good feeling. Very pleasant. I smiled as I appreciated how in tune the guitar and accompanying voice were. He didn't seem to notice me amongst the small group that had formed around him. Those souls that also wanted to experience those goosebumps you get when someone is talented at what they do. He finished his song, something I didn't know. How long had he been sitting there? Well, his face and nose were red, so I figured a while.

The group of people clapped and dropped their money in his case and I followed suit. Rasputin was the right word now, Demyx. I tried to make my way to the front as he started up a new song. The notes hit my ears and I recognized it immediately. I could have been fucking Shazam. Ride the Tide by the Screamin' Cheetah Wheelies. Not many people knew that song, I was impressed. It was also my jam, so I pushed through that conglomeration of regular civilians and office workers in their reasonably priced parkas. I reached him and we made eye-contact. He smiled as he sang and he looked like he was in a commercial. Damn, Demyx was gonna be famous someday. I knew it.

I didn't even scan the faces of the crowd; I was so excited to see Demyx. I built up my courage to finally sing in public, despite how insecure I was about my voice. The chorus is where we met and harmonized like angels taking a shit. It was rad. This particular song was rather difficult to sing, but we killed it, I swear. I completely disregarded the fact that we were like hippy shitbags that sing on the street, I was having fun.

With the end of the song, we smiled at each other like we just won a marathon. It was actually the most fun I had in weeks. They clapped for us and I felt like I was actually worth a shit for once. They quickly dispersed when Demyx didn't start back up, though. Which didn't bother me as much as I thought it would. People have shit to do.

"Okay, I know you said your singing voice sounds like seagull sex at inpatient, but it totally doesn't. You fucking rock, man."

Demyx was too nice for his own good. I'm not actually talented at anything. Just kind of mediocre at shit. Except being an asshole. I'm a professional asshole. PhD in assholery.

"Nah, man. You're just being nice."

“What the fuck ever. I know talent when I see it.”

He started playing again without giving me a chance to retort. We played like that for a good thirty minutes. I think we covered pretty much every decade. The crowd evened out and it was just kind of a steady flow of people. We played a shitty rendition of Slide by the Goo-Goo Dolls because we both knew it and we are also disgusting. I actually debated standing up and adding theatrics to my singing, but decided it was too cold for that shit. But not too cold to sit outside and play music for money, right?

I felt bored most of my life, so this was a good change. Despite my shaking hands and occasional puff of a cancerstick mid-song, it was a great time. I looked up to observe the trashy eighteen-year-old bitches in pajamas coming to get foodstamps with their mixed-nut children in tow and was pleasantly surprised. Very, very surprised.

He was here too.

Goddamnit! Why was he here? I could barely make him out, but I knew. I just fucking knew. The stature, the black t-shirt under that ugly purple TWLOHA hoodie.

I stopped in the middle of a word as he grew closer. He was with that woman that was probably his mom. The one with the tired eyes. She was dressed rather nicely and her hair was done. A lot different than when I see her at the hospital to pick him up or that one time at inpatient. She lit up a cigarette and sat on a bench by the tasteful rock garden. Shithead came our way and I wasn't sure if he knew it was us. I mean, Demyx and I are pretty fucking hard to miss; we look pretty unique. I got progressively more nauseous, which was probably nerves or the breakfast burrito from Speedway, as he got closer. Demyx stopped playing and looked up too.

“Hey, isn't that Roxas?”

Demyx's tone of voice was kind of weird and I couldn't pinpoint what he was trying to convey. But it was definitely Roxas. His amused expression was really evident on his distinct features. Then I felt it.

I felt terrible about what I had done the night prior. Terrible isn't even the right word, horrific is a better one. She was literally a kid, and so was he. I was almost an adult and those dirty acts sprinkled with fantasies of that little blond dicklick made my stomach churn worse than before as he grew closer.

I was going to stand up to leave because I thought I was going to puke from the awkwardness that stirred up inside of me like the rage normally did. I couldn't will myself to do it.

“Hey, Demyx. I could hear you playing all the way at the door. I would give you money, but I don't have any on me. You're definitely better than me.”

Did he just ignore me? He didn't even meet my eyes. Because, you know, everything was about me.

“Nice to see you too.”

I spat at him. In turn, he rolled his eyes at me.

“I see you every day. I haven't seen Demyx since inpatient. Plus, he's more likeable anyways.”

His mouth cocked into a smile, which set a fire in my chest I wouldn't be able to extinguish even with the most expensive whiskey. Why does this happen to me? Before I could respond, Demyx spoke up. He was beaming.

“Aww, Roxas. I'm sure you tear it up on the drums, man.”

Demyx didn't even acknowledge the fact that I am apparently unlikeable. This was the problem at hand, Demyx! I was going to say something, I don't remember what, when Roxas' expression changed at the mention of drums. He looked disappointed, which is an expression I am well acquainted with. It's a common theme of people that meet me. Hell, it might as well be my dad's resting face. But I didn't know why drums made him sad. Fuck, I didn't even know he played drums. I was soon distracted from that thought as soon as his face changed to portray excitement the best it could. I looked at him puzzled.

“Axel, do you have a couple dollars?”

I narrowed my eyes in confusion.

“Uh, yeah. Why?”

He opened his mouth to say something, but I interrupted him before he could even get the first

syllable out.

“I don’t know if I can do this. I mean, you said you use teeth.”

I really shouldn’t have been making blowjob jokes with the way the guilt was growing inside of me. But I couldn’t help it. It was just me. He raised an eyebrow under those shaggy bangs.

“Okay, you can’t afford my goods anyway, baby. I am top-shelf quality.”

He then proceeded to stand with his hip cocked. His hand landed on it as he winked at me. Fuck me.

Roxanne by The Police sprang from my lips with such a force that I could have been the Dragonborn with my incredible use of The Voice. It was extra funny because, not only was that song about prostitutes, it kinda sounded like his name. He pursed his lips in sync with the ‘really?’ expression that appeared on his face. I swear Demyx was going to piss his pants.

“No, but seriously. Can I have some money? It’s early and coffee is necessary for my survival. Don’t make me beg.”

I stopped my beautiful cover of a classic and stared at him.

“Why don’t you ask your mom? Isn’t it her job to provide for you?”

“Because she doesn’t approve of my destructive caffeine habit. Come on.”

I tried to put up a fight, I really did. But staring at him for a couple seconds, I caved. I lifted my ass off the ground and dug around in my pocket for loose money. Triumphant, I pulled a five from the dark recesses of my pocket and handed it to him.

“There, go buy yourself Starbucks or something, you hipster shit.”

I laughed as I spoke. I didn’t necessarily want him to leave, but the guilt was starting feel uncomfortable as it settled at the bottom of my stomach. It was kind of like when you don’t shake the Italian dressing bottle for awhile and all the shit goes to the bottom. Yeah, that.

“No, I’m going to McDonald’s. Their coffee is superior to all other coffees.”

“Great, have fun.”

I expected him to be on his merry way, but lingered. Like a fart in a supermarket. I was about to ask him what his deal was, but his voice sliced through my train of thought.

“And you’re coming too. My treat.”

He grinned at me. I nervously smiled back and added:

“Are you asking me on a date?”

“Of course not! Demyx is coming too. Unless you’re into polygamous relationships or whatever.” That grin stayed plastered on his face. I glanced Demyx’s way for some solace. It was for naught.

“Yeah, Axel is a Mormon. Brother husbands for life.”

“I seriously thought you were going to say ‘moron.’”

They shared a laugh over their less than clever jokes. I pouted at them. Trying to redeem myself I said:

“Guys, Mormons aren’t even polygamists anymore. Don’t be offensive. Gosh.”

The ‘Gosh’ was said in a Napoleon Dynamite voice. The sarcasm was there, but I don’t think they got it because Mr. Mullet let out a ‘ha,’ just one.

“Since when are you concerned about not being offensive, Axel? You asked if someone with Parkinson’s did Ms. Christy’s hair at inpatient.”

I chortled at that sweet nostalgia. I had totally forgotten about that.

“I wanted to draw attention to it because her poor dyeing skills offended me on a spiritual level.”

“Your hair is trashy Ariel red, Axel. I don’t want to hear it. And it’s obviously not your natural color.”

Ouch, Roxas’ words pierced through my façade I had built on pseudo-self-love and fake bravado. My insecurities shown through like the break of dawn as I prepared to snap at him. I had to resuscitate my composure some way.

“I’m kidding. Don’t look so upset. I meant it in the most endearing way possible.”

That was in no way endearing! It didn’t make me feel better either. I didn’t know what to say to him as I simmered in diarrhea colored rage chili. I was glad when Demyx spoke. Just one word, though.

“Savage.”

“Roxas has no chill.”

I smiled meekly upon finishing that phrase. Which is strange because ‘meek’ isn’t exactly a word one would use to describe me.

Demyx took the initiative and stood up. They both stared down at me like the creepy cat painting in my house. I, less than gracefully, pulled myself from the ground. My legs tingled from being asleep as I tried to gain my balance. Demyx proceeded to pocket our earnings, but not before offering me a cut. I declined; money is not what I needed. I needed Jesus.

After he put his guitar in the case, we were ready to go. Roxas started walking in the general direction of McDonald’s, but I stopped him.

“Are you sure your mom doesn’t care? Maybe you should ask her. Don’t want to get a text from the Amber Alert people that you’re missing.”

“Nah, she can text me if she gets worried. Besides, I told her you guys were my friends and she seemed satisfied with that. To be honest, the only reason I’m here with her is because she didn’t want to leave me home alone.”

Well, that seemed reasonable enough. He didn’t need to explain anymore; my dad was the same way. He was waiting for me to initiate the trek to McDonald’s. I guess I’m leader material. I shrugged my shoulders and we were on our way.

McDonald’s was relatively close to the government building, so it wasn’t an actual trek. I was cold as shit, though. The cold does bother me anyways, but I had already decided we weren’t taking the Shaggin’ Wagon because it would be a waste of resources. Plus, the dick-shriveling cold was good for the soul, right?

The walk there was followed by surprisingly comfortable silence. Demyx had a pained expression on the way. I wanted to ask him if he was alright, but decided against it. None of us wanted to be pitied, especially Demyx. I didn’t want Demyx to feel like a freak or whatever. I knew he was hallucinating and there was no need to bring it up and embarrass him.

Walking next to Roxas seemed to lighten my mood, aside from the occasional guilty pangs. Today was turning out to be a good day. I really hoped he didn’t ask about Larxene, though. I wasn’t mentally prepared to talk about it, but I also wanted to know about him and Kairi. I was entranced by the way he walked, which is weird. But watching his hair sway as he walked was pretty fucking soothing.

Upon arriving at the Golden Arches, we were greeted with a gust of warm air, grumpy teenaged employees, and plenty of ugly Christmas sweaters. I seated myself in a booth way too large for the three of us. It was one of those half-circle ones.

This McDonald’s was pretty basic. The one by my house was nicely decorated with fake hanging plants, tacky paintings, and a fireplace in a glass wall thing. This Mickey D’s was plain. Like it probably should be. It was actually a great symbol of what the food and service is like. Less than spectacular.

Demyx sat next to me as Roxas went to get coffee. I watched him walk up there like the disgusting lecher I was. He had no ass, but that’s okay. I caught myself and tried to stare anywhere besides him. I tried looking at some conventionally good-looking women seated close to us, but it was no use. I was too far gone.

He came back and I expected him to have a pussy iced coffee, but was satisfied to see him with actual semi-biodegradable cups. Not because I’m a hippy earthchild, though. I swear. There’s just something so satisfying about poking holes in an empty coffee container.

He sat it down in front of me unceremoniously. I took a sip and twisted my face in disgust. My soul may be black, but my coffee needs to be a pleasant tan. I wasn’t a real man. I jumped up and scooped a lot more sugar and creamer than necessary in my arms. Roxas looked mildly amused as he drank his black.

“So, I have to ask. How did last night go? You know, with Larxene?”

Curiosity adorned his features well, but I didn’t get to appreciate it as a lump in my throat formed mid-swallow. I forced it down hard. ‘Well, we did the do and I fantasized about it being you the whole time so I’d say pretty well’ But you see, you can’t just say off the wall shit all the time. Especially if he really was dating Kairi.

“Um, well. It was certainly interesting.”

What the fuck else was I supposed to say? He raised an eyebrow and said:

“So you had sex with her.”

I felt my face flush. Which seemed to be happening a lot more lately because of him. Seriously, what do you say to that? I managed to stutter out a ‘yeah’ and immediately took a gulp of coffee that I allowed to scald my mouth and throat. I knew I would regret the little mouth blisters later, but I needed to feel it go down esophagus. I hoped it would wash away the embarrassment and shame that had pooled there.

“Oh. Well then. Are you dating her now or was it, like, a onetime thing?”

“Definitely a onetime thing. Can we, uh, not talk about this?”

He seemed surprised at this answer and I didn’t know if it was because of the not dating or the not wanting to talk about it. He didn’t bug me anymore about it and turned his attention to Demyx, who had been too quiet. Roxas looked concerned.

I looked at Demyx too and I’m sure the same expression was on my face. His elbows were on the table with his head cradled in his hands. He was whispering to himself. I could barely make out the word ‘stop’ as I felt my heart break for him. Which is super gay and feely, but Demyx was my friend. And despite being a raging asshole, I was a good friend.

“Demyx? You okay, man?”

He was gently clawing at his ears and the sides of his head. It hit me that maybe that’s why the sides of his head were shaved and not some obscene fashion statement. He stopped, but didn’t look up when he said:

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. This happens frequently.”

I was going to lay a reassuring hand on his shoulder, but I didn’t want to scare him since he said his hallucinations were of paranoia.

“Do you want me to take y-?”

“No, I’ll be okay.”

His voice had a tone that I had never heard him use. It was kind of dangerous. I was just going to ask him if he wanted to go home, not the hospital. I would never do that to him, unless he told me he really needed it. Not everyone enjoys the hospital like me. He was honestly scaring the shit out of me, though. Not because he’s schizophrenic, but because I didn’t want to see him suffer.

Schizophrenics aren’t even scary and I don’t understand the intense stigma associated with them. I guess people are just afraid of things they don’t understand.

Roxas was fidgeting with his half-empty coffee cup when I glanced at him.

“Axel, do you think you can take me home later? I hate to ask or burden you, but my mom is leaving soon and I want to make sure Demyx is okay.”

I figured they had become close at inpatient while I was in the brig. And I mean, seriously, how could you not like Demyx? We crazies gotta stick together. Also spending more time with blondie? You bet I was all over that.

“Yeah, of course.”

We sat in silence, more awkward this time. We both tried not to stare at Demyx until he finally lifted his head. His eyes were glassy and red.

“Okay, I’m good. Don’t worry about me, guys.”

I furrowed my brow at him.

“Of course we’re going to worry about you, Demyx. You’re our bro.”

He smiled weakly while staring at the table.

“Brah.”

“Bruh.”

The mood after that was not like it was at the Hobo Hangout, but we got along. Sharing a few laughs, we tried to lighten to mood and ignore that we were all fucked up for a minute.

Meanwhile, I slowly fell harder for Roxas. I hung onto every word he said like it might be his last. I let him laughter reverberate in my soul as I continued to feel even more uncomfortable about my sexuality.

We all had to be home before Christmas Eve dinner, so we left that McDonald’s not too long

after. Walking in relative silence to my car would have made me uneasy, but I was happy I was with my friends. Even the scuffing of their shoes filled me with white. The black I felt usually was blotted out. I was even starting to feel better about the Larxene thing.

Demyx called shotgun and we all boarded the Millennium Falcon, AKA my car. It wasn't very impressive. I wouldn't go out in it to pick up chicks, or, uh, dudes in it. 1999 station wagon. My dad has, on several occasions, offered to buy me a better car. But I liked it, it has personality. More personality than me, to be fair.

Demyx lived kinda far so we voted to take him home first. He took it upon himself to grab the AUX cord.

"When your homie hands you the AUX cord."

"You better play some fire, Demyx."

Insert corny sitcom laughter after that joke. Listening to Demyx's oldies playlist was nice. He had good taste, even though it was mostly 70s and I'm more of a 90s guy. I wondered what kind of music Roxas liked. He wore band t-shirts pretty much every day, but I never really paid attention to it. It was probably shit like A Day to Remember or My Chemical Romance. Typical emo baby stuff.

We had to have been over half-way there when Demyx reached into the backseat. I guess he couldn't reach what he was looking for because he said to Roxas:

"Hey, can you hand me that little bag in my guitar case, Roxas?"

I briefly wondered what Demyx needed right now as I heard Roxas root around in his guitar case. Upon taking the bag, Demyx unzipped it and I immediately knew what it was.

"Dude, Demyx. Are you serious?"

It's not like I really cared, I seriously didn't. I would have requested some if I hadn't been driving and if I weren't going to my drug cop uncle's house for dinner.

"Dude, Axel. Yeah."

I sighed as he lit up his joint and took a hit.

"We're in public, dude. Also, don't they say that marijuana makes schizophrenia worse?"

My mullet-donned friend laughed and held the joint in Roxas' direction.

"It's a joint, Axel. It's not like we're smoking a fucking bong. And they do, but they're wrong. It seriously helps me. Plus, I don't think I could sit through another Wasserman family dinner sober. We talked about masturbation at the table during Thanksgiving."

I ignored the masturbation comment because that was weird and looked in the rearview mirror as Roxas took a hit and held it. Well, this wasn't the first time for him. There was something so fucking erotic about watching him smoke, but still. He was a kid.

"Roxas don't encourage this illegal drug use in my car."

He exhaled and smiled slyly.

"You don't ever turn down the joint, Axel. It's sacrilege to do so. It's in the code. And you don't normally seem too worried about... The legality of things."

Damn, he was fiery today. I liked it, despite the guilt that I was unsuccessfully trying to repress.

"I would offer you some, but you're driving. New Year's."

Oh yeah. I had forgotten that we had made plans for New Year's. I was going to say something about getting 'turnt as fuck,' but was interrupted by Demyx again.

"You can come too, Roxas." Demyx looked at me with this sneaky expression that I didn't get to fully appreciate because I valued their lives and I suck at multi-tasking. But had I said something to Demyx about the Roxas thing in my drunken stupor the night before? "It's at Axel's house."

There was a pause in conversation before Roxas said:

"I don't know. I wouldn't be able to get there. I can't drive until April."

What? He was fifteen? Older than I expected, honestly. Demyx finished toking and once again handed it to Roxas. I couldn't imagine what a high Roxas would be like, but I would find out soon enough. With an exhale Demyx said:

"We can come get you! Axel is getting me."

Shit, Demyx. Making plans without my consent. I'm sure he only did it because I would be fine with it. Really fine with it.

Roxas seemed to be mulling it over while he held smoke in his lungs. I actually really wanted him to come, so I blurted out:

“You can bring Kairi.”

I tried not to sound too eager. He blew out with a cough. He looked confused.

“Why would I bring Kairi?”

“I dunno. Aren’t you guys a thing?”

From what I could see, his face was neutral, but swiftly morphed into a look of amusement. Extreme amusement. I didn’t get what was funny as he started cracking up. And he just kept laughing. Demyx joined in because laughter is highly contagious when you’re buzzed.

“You... You really thought... I was dating Kairi?”

He gasped for air as he spoke. I felt stupid in every limb in my body as his laughter filled my car. Normally I would be swooning like a Japanese school girl at his laugh, but it was directed at me. How was I supposed to know that? She hung on him like a fucking koala.

The laughter died down and I looked into the rearview mirror again at blondie. He looked pretty relaxed. Probably because his head was thrown back against the seat and he was staring at the ceiling. I then glanced at Demyx, who had that goofy look on his face. So this is what it’s like to be the sober friend.

I never did answer his question. I didn’t really need to, their highs were setting in and I seized the opportunity to drop the subject. I felt really dumb until I saw Roxas petting the upholstery in my backseat.

Demyx lived on the outskirts of our county. I’d only been there a couple times. One time was for OMEA Honor Band in 8th grade. Now, before you start thinking I was at least semi-talented, I was 6th chair out of six total chairs for my section. And the audition music was simple. And Mr. K also insisted. He liked me for whatever reason. It had to have been one of the worst weekends of my life and my dad still has the proof of it in recording form somewhere. It’s barf-worthy.

The Wasserman residence was a humble townhome. It made me really not want to have him over. I didn’t want him to feel embarrassed by my fucking mansion. It embarrassed even me sometimes. Demyx said goodbye. Well, actually, he said ‘deuces.’ He grabbed his guitar out of the backseat, saluted us, and went in the house. Roxas was still staring at my ceiling, probably discovering life’s greatest mysteries in the lining.

I waited for him to move up front, but he didn’t. He had a stupid look on his face as I turned around in my seat to face him. I waved my hand in front of him.

“Ground control to Major Tom.”

I half-sung it. I had waited all my life to use that line on someone. He slowly lifted his head up like it weighed a ton and looked me in the eye. He was one of those people that could never be high in public because he eyes got bloodshot beyond all fuck.

“Roxas, get up here. I’m not your chauffeur.”

He got this intense expression and stared me down.

“Axel, I have a problem.”

I thought he was going to drop a bomb on me. Like that he had HIV or he loved me or whatever. I hoped it would be the latter, but I would have been satisfied with both at that point.

“I don’t think my legs exist anymore.”

Demyx, what the fuck kind of shit did you give this kid?! He looked so serious, but after that I couldn’t hold it in. I didn’t fucking cackle or anything; I just gave him a worried look while my body shook from silent laughter. You know that special kind of laughter that only happens when you laugh so hard it doesn’t make a sound. I managed to gasp out:

“You are so gone.”

I should have been recording because he would have been a YouTube sensation as he looked at me like the ‘Is this real life?’ kid. I actually cackled this time.

He eventually did move to the passenger seat, but not without a struggle. He didn’t open the door, he climbed into the seat. Was I like this when I was high? I don’t think so; he must just have an intense reaction to it. It also depended on the weed. I didn’t know what Demyx got. His flat affect was even worse and his eyes were so relaxed he almost could have passed for Asian.

“Roxas, where do you live?”

“Think of the snobbiest town around. Go!”

I didn’t want to play games with him. Mostly because he was high. But I also wanted to spend time with him and make it as pleasant as possible. This was the first time since inpatient that we had been alone.

“Uh, West Chester?”

His face lit up and he made a gun-hand and pointed it at me.

“Bingo!”

I only knew that because nearly all of my dad’s political butt-buddies lived there. Bunch of hoity-toity Republican scum. What the fuck did Roxas’ parents do?

I drove in that direction while Roxas fumbled with the radio. He put it on an oldies station that was one of my presets. Mostly because they played a lot of Nine Inch Nails. It was definitely better than most of the trendy garbage they play on the other stations. Even though I regret to admit that I do jam to trendy music occasionally. It was my guilty pleasure. I am disgusting. The beginning of Africa by Toto came on. Fuck, this song was overplayed, even today. I went to change it, but the exasperated gasp and the look on his face immediately halted my action. I had never seen a fifteen-year-old kid of this generation get so excited about 80s music.

He got really into it. Especially during the chorus. Complete with dramatic arm-waving and interpretive seat dancing. He really blessed those rains down in Africa. His voice cracked as he sang over the radio. I didn’t know if he was just comfortable or if it was the drugs. I didn’t really care. I watched him out of the corner of my eye and felt my heart swell to the brim with yucky feelings of affection and admiration. Basic lovey-dovey bullshit. I was the Grinch as my heart grew past its capacity and I sang along with him during the last refrain. I saw his smile widen. Something about watching someone you care about get enthusiastic about something is really beautiful. And gross. I was gross.

I secretly hoped this was the real Roxas. That the snarky, emotionless thing he does was just a guise to hide goofy Roxas. Because that was exactly what I did. Underneath all of my sass and condescending, off the wall comments I was just a goofy kid. We just build up these faces to combat the world around us and it’s really a shame.

He beamed almost all the way there. They played some other songs that he seemed to recognize, but it wasn’t nearly like Africa. Getting off at his exit, I saw him pull out his phone.

“What’s your number?”

I smiled as I spoke. I didn’t turn to him.

“Damn, you already asked me on a date and now you want my number. I must be some catch.”

“I like to think you are.”

My smile faded. What?

“What do you mean?”

I was really confused. I’m sure I looked angry, that was just my face most of the time, but I wasn’t. I was just confused. Sending mixed signals and shit.

“Most people think you’re a complete dick, but I like to think there’s a great person down there somewhere.”

I figured it was the drugs talking, even as the butterflies in my stomach had seizures. My mouth twitched like it was going to smile, but turned itself into a scowl.

“Well you would be wrong.”

Why did I have to do this? Why did I have to shut him out now? This wasn’t going to protect you, Axel. This was just going to make you hate yourself more.

He pointed out his house and I pulled into the driveway. It was a pretty nice house. I then proceeded to casually read the name on the house because I was curious. ‘Starkey.’ Hmm, my dad talked to a Starkey often. I didn’t know if they were male or female, but he did say something about them being county prosecutor. Yeah, my dad had helped with that campaign. Wow, one of Roxas’ parents was a politician too. Holy shit, small world. I was going to say something about it, but I was distracted as soon as I turned to him. His expression was dead serious and he looked me straight in the eyes.

“You’re a good person, Axel. You might be an asshole, but you’re a good person. Please don’t think differently.”

His voice wasn’t that floaty high voice anymore. He sounded legitimate. Oh yeah, what was I going to say again? No one had ever said that to me. I had always just assumed I was the worst and went about my life. No one had ever given me the option of otherwise.

Upon his opening of my car door and swinging around to get out, I grabbed his shoulder. Which in turn caused him to flinch. I immediately regretted it. You do know what they say. The people that get scared when you touch them always have a reason to. I felt my stomach sink past my knees. I just wanted to take that little shit into my arms and coddle the fuck out of him. But I voted instead to shout my phone number at him as I let him go. His phone was whipped out at the speed of light, fingers ablaze as he punched in my number.

“I’ll text you. Merry Christmas.”

He didn’t give me a chance to respond as he took off in a jog to his house.

What the fuck kind of day was this? I was so emotionally drained and confused that I just wanted to go home and sleep for days. Did he mean what he said? Someone actually believed in me.

Someone didn’t think I was a disappointment. It’s incredible what an impact a few words can have on someone because the rest of the day I felt great.

I was glad I didn’t kill myself.

I also couldn’t wait until New Year’s.

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